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Plato and Aristotle, fragment from Raphael's "School of Athens"
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THE DEBATE OVER THE ORIGIN
OF GENIUS DURING
THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

*The Theories of Supernatural Frenzy and Natural Melancholy in
Accord and in Conflict on the Threshold of the Scientific Revolution*

BY

NOEL L. BRANN



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In memory of Jim Weaver

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East Meadow, New York
June, 2001

INTRODUCTION

During the Renaissance when the phenomenon of genius had reached one of its cyclic acmes in the western world, and in the geographical locus of Italy where its manifestations were singularly conspicuous, it is not by chance that genius itself became a focal point of intellectual speculation.¹ For some thinkers of that time and place genius suggested possibilities of the human mind which transcend the finite limits of material nature, whereas for others, no matter how marvel-working it might appear to the uneducated eye, genius was necessarily circumscribed by the finite boundaries of nature. As viewed by the first group, genius was, at its core, a supernatural miracle originating in the transcendent realm of God, whereas for the second group it was a thoroughly natural expression of the human psyche.

The contentious question of the origin of human genius, it will be evident from the following pages, predated the Renaissance by many centuries, since it also lay at the source of an ancient philosophical division between two ways of looking at reality conveyed

¹ Eminently testifying to this truth is Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, available to English readers in the trans. of S.G.C. Middlemore (rev. ed. Irene Gordan, New York: Mentor, 1960). Cf. Leonardo Olschki, *The Genius of Italy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), epilogue, p. 430: "Whatever was achieved in two millenia within the geographical and linguistic boundaries of Italy has borne the mark of universality." An excellent survey of the cultural milieu surrounding the debate over the origin of genius, with many of its participants treated in related matters, is provided by Vincent Cronin in two volumes: *The Florentine Renaissance* (London: Collins, 1967), and *The Flowering of the Renaissance* (London: Collins, 1969). For other background studies of Italian Renaissance thought informing the present topic see, *inter alia*, the first vol. of Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der Neuern Zeit*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922); Giovanni Gentile, *Il Pensiero Italiano del Rinascimento* (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 4th ed., 1968); G. Saitta, *Il Pensiero Italiano nell'Umanesimo e nel Rinascimento*, 3 vols. (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 2nd ed., 1961); and Eugenio Garin, *Storia della Filosofia Italiana*, 3 vols. (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1966). Complementing these studies in putting many of the writers here cited into context are *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Krayer (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988); Albert Rabil, Jr., ed. *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), esp. the first and third vols.; and Brian B. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992).

by potentially opposing schools of thought. On one side of this divide lay Platonism, and on the other side, Aristotelianism. As P.O. Kristeller has summarized this bifurcative philosophical trend: "Among the many philosophers of classical antiquity, two thinkers have exercised a wider and deeper influence upon posterity than any others, Plato and Aristotle. The controversy and interplay between Platonism and Aristotelianism has occupied a central place in many periods of Western thought, and even the modern student who receives but an elementary introduction to Greek philosophy will inevitably get acquainted with the thought, and with some of the writings, of Plato and Aristotle."² Likewise amply testified by Kristeller in the work in hand, it is the Renaissance period, the dominant philosophical spokesmen of which heavily drew upon the ancients to lend authoritative anchoring to their opinions, which pre-eminently highlights what he terms both "interplay" and "controversy" between the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. By extension, the Renaissance period also pre-eminently highlights the interplay and controversy between the two traditions so far as they impacted upon the debate over the origin of human genius.

Put another way, the theories of genius formulated by the two pre-eminent philosophical traditions of Platonism and Aristotelianism, together with their theories in related metaphysical, ethical, and psychological questions, followed alternative paths that sometimes intersected and other times diverged. So far as emphasis is placed more on disagreement than agreement between these alternative philosophical schools, the Platonists will be seen to refer their query into the origin of genius to a realm of eternal ideas presumed to be capable not only of transcending the vicissitudes of nature, but, more controversially, of countering natural laws by means of supernatural (read: miracle-working) powers instilled by God in the human mind. The Aristotelians, on the other hand, to the extent that they managed to extricate their philosophical principles from a longstanding interconnection with Platonism going back to ancient and early medieval times, will be observed more modestly to refer the origin of genius to its natural constituents.³

² Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979), p. 32.

³ Concerning the wider European debate over the genial potential of melancholy see Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Dürers 'Melencolia I': Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche*

From their standpoint of transmundane idealization, the Christian Platonists construed genial inspiration (literally, *in-spiratio*, that is, a breathing into the soul) as agitations or “frenzies” (*furor*) generated from that place above finite nature where is located the infinitely removed realm of eternal ideas, whereas the Aristotelians, with their principles of idealization resting within rather than above the finite natural world, conceived of genius as flowing out of, rather than originating from a place beyond, the natural sphere. More directly to the point of the present study: armed with a text popularly but spuriously ascribed to Aristotle authorizing their opinion, the Aristotelians construed the spark of genius to be generated by a moderately inflamed melancholy humor. Following affiliated astrological theory, which customarily placed humoral melancholy under the aegis of the planet Saturn, a variant way of putting this same natural-supernatural division hinged on whether melancholy-inducing Saturn, as suggested by Dante in his *Paradiso*, is to be considered as occupying a perimeter of Heaven transcending nature or, alternatively, whether Saturn is to be viewed as representing merely the outermost reaches of the natural hierarchy from where it is able to influence genial behaviour through occult means. Of the proofs of this age that Platonic supernaturalism and Aristotelian naturalism increasingly found it difficult to live in happy accord, one of the more patently visible is the evolving sense of incompatibility between these alternative versions of genius—one supernaturally frenzied and the other naturally melancholic—as the Renaissance moved into its later stages.

At the crux of the Renaissance debate over the origin of genius, as will be made clear in the pages to follow, lay the demon question coming to a head in the witch-craze. Lending considerable force to this development in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as though omens simultaneously signifying the dusk of one great historical epoch and the dawn of another, were such castastrophic events

Untersuchung (Leipzig: Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, B.G. Teubner, 1923), subsequently enlarged and translated into English by Raymond Klibansky as *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), and Winfried Schleiner, *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), the latter with special attention given to its implications for the religious reform movement. For a briefer query into this subject see H.-Günter Schmitz, “Das Melancholieproblem in Wissenschaft und Kunst der frühen Neuzeit,” *Sudhoffs Archiv: Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 60 (1976), 135–62.

as the Black Plague, Hundred-Years War, and the Avignon “captivity” of the Church. This widely shared sense of confusion and insecurity, further compounded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the severe disturbances fomented by the Protestant and Catholic reform movements, served to undermine many of the basic presuppositions upon which the psychological and social cohesion of medieval Europe had traditionally rested. Of the various results of this extensive disruption of European life and manners, one of the more conspicuous was a zealous pursuit of scapegoats, many victims of which, along with the more usual kinds of heretics and infidels, were accused of demonically instigated sorcery.⁴

As illustrated by the witch persecutions, then, history can rarely be charted along a consistently upward-tending straight line that can be termed, without important qualifications, “progress.” A time notable for making great strides forward in many respects—technological, cultural, and intellectual—is also notable for sowing widespread psychological disorientation and social dislocation. For modern believers of social and cultural progress it is a comforting thought to assume that the decline of the European witch hunts chronologically coincided with the rise of the modern sciences and of philosophical rationalism in their attendance. However, as a number of Renaissance scholars have pointed out in recent years, the historical evidence does not lend support to this contention, serving notice, to the contrary, that the vehemence of the persecutions, instead of abating with the onset of the scientific revolution as we might expect, became more intensified and widely dispersed.⁵

⁴ For a summary and provocative interpretation of these events on a European-wide scale see esp. Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (New York: New American Library, 1975). Cf. H.R. Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth Centuries and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 1956), pp. 90 ff.; Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972, 1979), ch. 2: “Witchcraft,” pp. 60 ff.; and Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1995). Focusing on the choice of women as principal scapegoats of the inquisitors is Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco/London: Pandora [Harper Collins], 1994). According to Stuart Clark, however, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 106 ff., female victimization in the witch hunts belonged to larger synchronic categories of contrariety and inversion predominating at the time. For clarification of Clark's thesis see below, p. 447.

⁵ Thus, according to Trevor-Roper in his famous essay on this subject (see note above), p. 91: “The years 1550–1600 were worse than the years 1500–1550, and the years 1600–1650 were worse still.” Cf. Levack, *Witch-hunt*, ch. 7, pp. 185 ff.

This is not to say that during this same period the critics of the witch persecutions did not also make their opinions known. An historical overview of the Renaissance, however, reveals that the witch hunts became more pronounced as the intellectual arguments against them became more acutely articulated. In this later phase of the witch persecutions, perhaps even more vehemently than in the earlier phase when principled opposition to the witch hunts was more muted, the pursuit of witches was not carried out without considerable intellectual justification to counter the claims of those who would reduce demonically instigated alienation to mere fits of melancholy.

Italy, the original home of the Renaissance and a land where Roman Catholicism retained a firm hold, was no exception to this rule. Indeed, if we are to believe a foremost historian of its early history, the very citadel of Renaissance humanism, Florence, did not escape its far-reaching tentacles. "At precisely the time when humanist ideals and values were replacing traditional medieval beliefs," Gene Brucker informs us, "the city was burning its heretics and its sorcerers."⁶ At the same time, however, Renaissance Italy also fostered some of Europe's more formidable opposition to these fanatical demonological currents. Representatives of two professional occupations in particular joined forces to form the cutting edge of this counterforce to the witch persecutions. The first group was comprised of lawyers, and the second, of physicians. The typical strategy of lawyers bold enough to stand up to the witch hunters was to highlight the questionable legal procedures employed by the zealous inquisitors in their attempts to secure convictions and to draw attention to a canon of medieval Church law—the so-called *canon episcopi*—declaring the belief in witch flights and magical transformations

Attempting to explain this seeming paradox by pointing up a persisting demonological credulity underlying early modern science is Irving Kirsch in two articles in the *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*: "Demonology and the Rise of Science: An Example of the Misperception of Historical Data," 14 (1978), 149–57, and "Demonology and Science during the Scientific Revolution," 16 (1980), 359–68. Echoing this thesis is Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, maintaining, e.g., p. 156, that "we would do better to associate demonology with development and, indeed, 'advancement', in natural knowledge than with stagnation or decay. If the devil was a part of early modern nature, then demonology was, of necessity, a part of early modern science—in which case there was no reason for it to remain intellectually inert."

⁶ Gene Brucker, "Sorcery in Early Renaissance Florence," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 10 (1963), 7–24 (at p. 8). For corresponding developments in later Venice see Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550–1650* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

through demonic means to be a heresy.⁷ And the typical strategy of comparably daring physicians, with Galen their principal guide, was to argue that a presumption of natural infirmity more accurately explains the aberrant behavior of those charged with being witches and sorcerers than one of supernaturally demonic influence.

Philosophically reinforcing the theological campaign against witches, on one hand, and the medical and legal campaign to exonerate them, on the other hand, were two distinctly opposed speculative positions on the demon question. Proponents of the first position, for which the philosophical tradition of Platonism was a prominent vehicle, maintained that witches and sorcerers, while showing outward signs of natural disturbances, at bottom are subject to occult agitations issuing from a demonic realm existing outside nature. And proponents of the second position, for which the Aristotelian tradition served as a principal vehicle, alternatively referred those same occult agitations to a natural provenance. A pivotal factor around which much of this debate revolved was the observation of melancholy in many of those said to be demonically alienated, summed up in the commonplace characterization of melancholy as “the bath of the Devil” (*melancholia balneum diaboli*).⁸

It is fitting, therefore, that much of the Renaissance debate over the causes of witchcraft hinged on the question of whether the diagnosis of natural melancholy in an accused witch or sorcerer furnishes an adequate explanation of his or her affliction. But it was not only the issue of demonic sorcery which this critical controversy helped to crystallize for subsequent generations. For if the arguments of this debate shed light on the question of supposed demonic intervention in the lives of humankind, they could also be said to shed impor-

⁷ See Cohn, *Demons*, pp. 211 ff. For a translation of this critical canon, incorporated into Gratian's *Decretum* (Part II, C. 26 q. 5 c. 12), see Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1888), I, 178–80, repr. in Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, ed. *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 29–31.

⁸ See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Tischreden*, no. 455: “Monachi dixerunt et vere: ‘Melancholicum caput est paratum balneum Diabolo’,” in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1883–1916), I. Cf. no. 2456, in vol. II: “Ubi est caput melancholicum, ibi Diabolus habet suum balneum.” On Luthers ambivalence regarding whether such melancholy is a wholly negative result of demonic manipulation of the soul or a more positive result of the soul's religious struggle with temptation (*Anfechtung*) and the consciousness of sin see Schmitz, “Melancholieproblem,” esp. pp. 143, 152–53.

tant light on a less dramatic but equally significant question facing the intellectuals and artists of the Renaissance, namely, the derivation of their own genius, which, at bottom, is inherently bound up with the demonic question through the supposition that extraordinary powers of mind, whether put to evil or to good ends, ultimately owe to an origin located either within or above nature. Alternatively put, demonology represents the dark side of the proposition, carried to its apogee by the Florentine Platonists, that all true genius is ultimately to be referred to a supernatural origin.

At the heart of the controversy over witches, it will be established in the present study, lay two principal questions directly impacting on the query into the origin of human genius. The first question is whether invisible supernatural entities known as demons exist at all, and the second question, whether demons can instill, either through or apart from nature, marvel-working powers in the human being. From a larger metaphysical-theological perspective the premise of the existence of demons and their influence on human behavior represents but the reverse side of the coin from a premise of divinely inspired genius, with the rationalization allowing for the instigation in human beings of a "demonic frenzy"—a *furor daemonicus*—capable of inciting the performance of astonishing feats of a nefariously bestial order also consistently allowing for a corresponding instigation of "divine frenzy"—a *furor divinus*—capable of inciting the performance of marvelous feats of a higher heavenly order. Put another way, the presumption of demonically instilled genius also logically entails the presumption of divinely instilled genius. Correlatively, the claim that so-called demonic possession is really inflamed natural melancholy, more properly treated by physicians than theologians, might be equally applied to a presumption of divinely inspired genius, which can thereby be alternatively viewed as an exalted but still natural state.

A position of compromise lying midway between these extremes is to conceive of natural melancholy as mediating between man and both demons and God alike in the instigation of human genius. During the high middle ages, as attested by the great scholastic theologians in the mode of Albertus Magnus, those appealing chiefly to the philosophical framework of Aristotle did not find it necessary to make a radical choice between these explanations, choosing instead to seek their underlying synthesis. When it came time to seek a comparable "scholastic" synthesis within a Platonic framework, as was

performed by Marsilio Ficino and his followers in fifteenth-century Florence, the disposition once again was to establish a principle of conciliation and harmonization between the supernaturalist explanation of genius favored by the Platonists and the naturalist explanation favored by the Aristotelians. As circumstances changed, however, and new pressures were brought to bear on this question signaled by the intensification of the witch hunts and the fragmentation of ecclesiastical unity, seeds of dissolution were planted in the synthetical theory of genius brought to fruition by Ficino. When this dissolutive process was completed, commensurate with the consolidation of the Protestant and Catholic reform movements, Platonists and Aristotelians were more likely to be found at each other's throats than in cooperative league with one another. It is a dissolutive process, we will further observe, which coincided with, and was assisted by, the renascence of an alternative to Platonic and Aristotelian speculation alike in the form of the ancient skeptical or Pyrrhonist school of thought, the effect of which was to detach the question of genius from the categories of rational discourse and subject it to dictates of faith.

The starting point of the philosophical debate over the origin of genius is found in the proposition, most notably espoused by Ficino at the center of the Florentine Platonic revival, that natural melancholy, being supremely adaptable to the agitations of demonic alienation, is equally adaptable to the agitations of divine alienation. Whereas the result in the first instance is the prodigious ability of the demonically inspired to effect illicit magic or sorcery, the result in the second instance is the ability of the divinely inspired to effect uncommon states of mystical ecstasy and contemplation, prophetic insight, philosophical acuity and profundity, poetic and artistic creativity, and other acts of extraordinary mental and spiritual prowess. In the first instance melancholy can be said to contribute to that genius which is the mainspring of sorcery, and in the second instance, to genius in its capacity as a prime motivator of what is most excellent and admired in the sweep of human productivity.

Taking exception to this synthetical interpretation of human genius were less accommodating schools of thought which, rather than being disposed to building a philosophical bridge between nature and supernature, were rather disposed to dismantling the bridge already built by their scholastic-minded forerunners, thereby highlighting what they held to be an impassable gulf dividing the two realms. On one side of this gulf were assembled the radical naturalists, philosophi-

cally identifying with Aristotle but also greatly influenced by the medical traditions of Hippocrates and Galen, and on the other side, two distinct sets of radical supernaturalists. The first group, while taking its lead from Ficino's revitalization of the Platonic philosophy, sharply departed from Ficino's assimilation of Aristotelian naturalist principles to its supernaturalist outlook. For these the Platonic revival became increasingly viewed, not as a crowning philosophical culmination of Aristotelian naturalist principles, but rather as a radical philosophical counterpoise to a Peripatetic philosophy lamentably entrenched in the universities. The second group, even more stridently anti-Peripatetic in its sentiments, took its lead from the ancient skeptics standing in principled opposition to all philosophical attempts to comprehend the incomprehensible.

At one pole of this naturalist-supernaturalist opposition the radical Aristotelians will be seen to argue that, inasmuch as the illicitly uncanny feats of those claimed to be under demonic auspices, the witches and black magicians, can be relegated to natural causes, likewise can licit acts of human genius correspondingly be attributed to purely natural causation. More specifically, these will shown to contend that if the condition of natural melancholy can be viewed as a primary causative agent behind claimed demonic inspiration, it can just as logically be viewed as a primary causative agent behind claimed divine inspiration. Sometimes in functional alliance with this group, we will further see, were certain medically-trained individuals who, even as they were philosophically inclined to the Platonic supernaturalist position, were prompted by their immediate attention to human physiology to adopt a kind of operational skepticism relating to the ultimate causes of mental alienation. For these, given the limited powers of the human mind to penetrate to the final causes of things, natural melancholy presented a more reliable guide to the causes of both evil and good genius than the presumption of inspiration either by demons or by God.

At the opposite pole of this naturalist-supernaturalist opposition, on the other hand, we will assess two schools of thought that sharply reacted to the foregoing naturalist trend. The first was a group of Platonists who, in ridiculing any thought that a mere natural humor can instigate supernatural powers, effectively distinguished themselves not only from the Aristotelian naturalists but also from the earlier Florentine Platonists who presumed to find a place for the melancholy humor in their doctrine of supernaturally inspired genius. And

the second school of thought sharply reacting to Aristotelian naturalism was one of skeptical fideists who carried their anti-Peripatetic sentiments to the extreme of sundering the causes of human genius from all natural determinants. Yet, as we will see, the radical Platonists and fideists concurred on a vital point. For, they agreed, the seed of genius planted by God in the human soul is capable of sprouting to full bloom quite independently of such terrestrial influences as natural melancholy.

Introducing the underlying categories within which the Renaissance debate over melancholy genius could take place, centered on pre-Ficinian developments, is the first chapter addressed to three different but interconnecting disciplines bearing on the issue—these, as it were, corresponding to a concatenation of three hierarchical levels reaching from the lowest biological needs of the human being to his highest spiritual needs. At each level, we will see, are fixed certain opposing normative tendencies which, if they are not countered and overcome, will effectively bar melancholy from participating in any possible form of genial activity. From this normative point of view the first discipline, corporeal medicine, interprets melancholy to be a joint physiological-psychological abnormality based on the theory of the four humors; the second discipline, theology, interprets melancholy, considered the closest humoral analogue to the capital vice of sorrow, to be a favored demonic intermediary; and the third discipline, that of humanist letters occupying a rung on the ladder of learning at a midpoint between medicine and theology, interprets melancholy to be an indicator of a serious moral defect. In our fuller explication of this triadic disciplinary span we will observe the medical theorists and humanists as sharing the conclusion that melancholy, a characteristic result of an overreaching mind in solitary detachment from the community, is most effectively countered by active societal engagement. Conversely, we will observe the theologians as maintaining that melancholy, the humor most favored by the demons as a corporeal inroad into human behavior, is most effectively countered, not by the frantic paces of social intercourse, but by the tranquillizing paces built into a program of spiritual exercises carried out in solitary separation from the crowd.

At each of these successive theoretical levels, we will see, melancholy tended to be construed by its Renaissance proponents as inherently detrimental to both mind and body. But also latently lurking beneath the surfaces of all three of these levels of interpretation, as will also be brought out in the following pages, were the rudiments

of that full-fledged doctrine of melancholy genius that was to be a distinctive mark of the Florentine Platonic movement. In our delineation of this shift from normative to transnormative approaches to the subject of human genius we will call on Plato to furnish us the crux of our organizing principle. For, by his famous subdivision of the divine frenzies—the *furor divinus*—into four primary varieties (mystical, prophetic, love, and poetic frenzy), Plato has also provided us with a helpful theoretical framework for the presentation of the basic categories of genius. Concerning the concept of mystical frenzy, the first of Plato's fourfold genial scheme, we will draw particular attention to the controversy over the value of the solitary contemplative life which was increasingly put on the defensive by the civic humanists during the Renaissance. Upheld by its advocates as a divinely inspired form of spiritual purification and perfection, and by its detractors as but an unhealthy way of life promoting melancholy, we will see how the theme of contemplative solitude also played into the hands of secular scholars with needs comparable to those of the mystics for tranquil leisure apart from the disturbances and demands of the crowd. And the secular scholars no less than religious contemplatives, as we will see, experienced considerable conflict between the benefits bestowed by solitary leisure on their studious vocation and the danger of that vocation becoming subverted by melancholy.

Concerning Plato's second-named prophetic frenzy, closely affiliated to the mystical frenzy through the nexus of mystical ecstasy and illumination, we will be made conversant with two prominent controversies on Italian soil. The first controversy centers on the question of whether, granted that a given prophecy is supernaturally instigated, it issues from a divine or from a demonic source. And the second controversy, extending the scope of its query from supernature to nature, centers on the question of whether accurate prophetic prediction owes to a supernatural instigation at all or merely to the natural ability of certain people, assisted by their fervid melancholy humors, to guess the future with uncanny accuracy.

With regard to Plato's third-named frenzy of love, likewise closely linked to its mystical counterpart through the principle of psychic ecstasy, we will highlight two of its major genial manifestations. The first is the frenzied love of wisdom, the literal meaning of which was absorbed into the Greek word *philosophia*, and the second, the frenzied love of beauty which is the justifying rationale for the cultivation of the literary, musical, and plastic arts. As in its mystical and prophetic analogues, our query into the subject of genial love will

enter into a controversy over whether its extraordinary powers owe more to supernatural or to natural causes. At the heart of this dispute will be shown to be, partly as the result of a linguistic coincidence and partly of a perceived analogy between lovers and heroes, the notion of "heroic love." For growing out of a play on the unaspirated Greek word *eros* (= love), which associates it with the aspirated *heros* (= hero), was a debate over whether "heroic" love is truly inspired from a supernatural source or is really nothing more than the natural pathological condition termed *hereos* or its variants by the ancient and medieval physicians.

Finally, concerning Plato's fourth-named frenzy, we will focus our attention on the aesthetic ramifications of the Platonic theory of poetic inspiration. This form of genius, as indicated above, is closely bound up with that of the frenzy of love through its aspiration to achieve intimacy with beautiful forms. But, as will be made clear in the following pages, the inclination of those discoursing on the remarkable powers of poetic frenzy was also to point out its special affinity with the mystical and prophetic frenzies by commonly depicting poetry as a kind of versified prophecy. To the extent that the principle of aesthetic creativity contained in this doctrine of poetic inspiration could be transferred to the visual arts, they too could justifiably be looked upon as the palpable products of mystical, prophetic, and amorous ecstasies. In the case of poetic creativity too we will have cause to take stock of a major debate over the origin of poetic and artistic genius, namely, whether genial achievements in the literary and artistic professions owe their inspiration to divine incitement or can be relegated to excitation by natural bodily humors such as melancholy.

In the course of the ensuing study I hope to establish that the Renaissance debate over the origin of melancholy genius constitutes something more than an interesting sideline of research for the curiously inclined. Given the popular identification of natural melancholy, on the one hand, with demonic influence and, on the other hand, with divine inspiration, the value of its study for an understanding of Renaissance thought goes to the very heart of the critical shift from a primarily theologically-founded supernaturalism dominating the medieval mind to a primarily secularly grounded naturalism characterizing the post-Renaissance centuries. As will be brought out, much the same kind of radical naturalistic methodology by means of which Machiavelli dissolved the scholastic synthe-

sis in political theory was applied by Pomponazzi, a foremost galvanizer of the Platonic-Aristotelian split to follow, to the metaphysical and theological realms, with the question of the origin of human genius constituting one of the foremost test cases. In this respect as in related ones such as the query into immortality and demons, Pomponazzi and his naturalist-minded followers will be shown to carry the supernatural-natural disjunction to the same logical extreme as did Machiavelli in the political sphere.

As will also be pointed out, that critical shift did not occur either suddenly or evenly, since very few writers were unable or unwilling, as Machiavelli and Pomponazzi, to cut radically loose from the theological guidelines laid down by centuries of indoctrination and habit. But as the history of scholarship has shown more than once, the increasing emphasis on a novel position in a controversy generally has the eventual effect of so enlarging the distance between the two sides as to set the stage, surrounding circumstances being amenable, to a thoroughgoing break between them. It is true that certain earlier thinkers, most notably William of Ockham (d. 1347) and Nicholas Cusanus (1401–1464), fully anticipated these divisive tendencies of the later Renaissance. For underpinning alike Ockham's celebrated logical "razor", Cusanus' epistemological doctrine of *docta ignorantia*, and late Renaissance skepticism is the presumption, effectively undercutting the possibility of metaphysical speculation by underscoring the disjunction between subjective knowledge and the objective world signified by its concepts, that "there is no proportion between finite and infinite things" (*finiti et infiniti nulla proportio*).⁹ It was, however, during the period stretching from the later quattrocento to the early seicento, designated the high and late Renaissance by customary

⁹ On this consequence of Ockhamite "terminism," see John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Career of Philosophy*, Vol. I: *From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 36 ff. An example of Ockham's razor is the dictum: "What can be explained by the assumption of fewer things is vainly explained by the assumption of more things" (*Frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora*), cited in William of Ockham, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, ed., trans. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson, 1957, 1959), intro., p. xxi. On Cusanus' corresponding doctrine of learned ignorance see Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), ch. 1, pp. 7 ff.; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 177 ff.; Schmitt and Skinner, *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 548 ff.; and Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 176 ff.

scholarly usage, that the conceptual split between nature and supernature reached its zenith. Nowhere is this development more dramatically displayed, as we will now attempt to show, than in the cradle of the cultural Renaissance, Italy, where a remarkable explosion of mystical, prophetic, philosophical, and creative genius also entailed a self-conscious query by various of its representatives into the roots of their prodigious endowments.

A preliminary note of caution: it will be noted from the table of contents that I have applied the term “philosophical” in the following chapters in a way that distinguishes it from an underground legacy of arcane speculation that, following the precedent made by Agrippa of Nettesheim in his *De occulta philosophia* (1510, revised 1533), would pre-empt that label for itself. As a working guideline I have applied the term “philosophical” in relation to the traditional Platonic and Aristotelian speculative traditions relevant to the present study, and “Hermetic” (derived from its most prominently named ancient avatar, Hermes Trismegistus) to the arcane traditions seeking to gain a more secure foothold, together with its accompanying respectability, alongside the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. This is not to say, it will be made clear, that occult speculation of the Hermetic sort does not also play into the larger Platonic and Aristotelian frameworks conditioning my treatment of the genius question during this period. However, where Hermetic sources tend to be uppermost in a given thinker’s mind, in some cases even suggesting them as a radical alternative to the traditional speculative systems, they will be considered in a category apart from those systems.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SEEDING OF A THEORY OF MELANCHOLY GENIUS: THE MEDICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HUMANIST LEGACIES

A. *The Medical Perspective*

Of the humoral dispositions attracting the interest of Renaissance thinkers, especially prominent was that diagnosed as melancholy by the physicians. The reason for this is that melancholy, more than other pathologically alienated states of mind, displayed a Janus-like countenance to many of its observers, being associated, together with symptoms we today generally impute to a manic-depressive disposition, with extraordinary powers of mind. To the extent that the physicians pointed out the internal connections of such remarkable mental powers to the infirmity they ostensibly set out to cure, they may be said to have helped to set the stage for a Renaissance vogue of melancholy. All that was needed was to place the symptoms of melancholy within a philosophical framework which would be capable of transforming its negative “vices” into positive “virtues.” The seed of the melancholy genius concept sprouted by Renaissance philosophy, that is to say, was first planted by ancient, medieval, and Renaissance medicine.

What, we ask, is the nature of the syndrome allowing for this remarkable transformation? The core symptoms of melancholy, as established by Hippocrates (ca. 460–377 B.C.) and Galen (ca. 130–200) in ancient times and often reiterated by their medieval and Renaissance heirs, are fear (*timor, metus*) and sorrow (*moestitia, tristitia*).¹

¹ Galen, *Opera quae exstant*, ed. D. Carolus Gottlob Kühn, 26 vols. (Leipzig: Car. Cnoblochii, 1822), VIII, 188: “. . . atque haec omisit, ut puto, quod ex morbi ipsius nomine manifeste declarentur, quum nos ab Hippocrate didicerimus: ‘Si metus et moestitia longo tempore obsidentia perseverent melancholicus est hujuscemodi affectus.’” For the ancient background of this theme see Hubert Tellenbach, *Melancholie: Zur Problemgeschichte* (Berlin: Springer, 1961), and Hellmut Flaschar, *Melancholiker in den medizinischen Theorien der Antike* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966). Emphasizing this condition from a sociological point of view is Edward Rosen, *Madness in Society: Chapters in the Historical Sociology of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), with ch. 3, pp. 71 ff., given over to its Greek and Roman treatments.

In addition the medical writers listed a number of secondary symptoms issuing out of these core ones, all gravitating around the mental faculty widely believed to be especially subject to the passions of fear and sorrow, the imagination.

A representative list of these symptoms is provided by the early quattrocento physician Giovanni Arcolani (= D'Arcole, ca. 1390–1458). Typically among the delusions to which melancholics are subject, according to Arcolani in his *Practica morborum omnium*, some imagine that the sky is falling or that they are being sucked into the earth; others that they are under attack by thieves, wolves, or demons; and still others that “they have been transformed into kings, wolves, demons, birds, or artificial instruments.” As for the corresponding emotional responses of those so afflicted, Arcolani noted that “some laugh, for they imagine that which is gratifies them and gives them pleasure, whereas others cry as they think on sad things.” Or still more difficult for grief-laden melancholics to endure, the writer further observed, they sometimes find that, while wanting to cry, they are unable, the reason being that, under the force of the adust form of melancholy which converts the initial cold and dry form of the humor into a hot and dry one, they find their eyes so dessicated along with the rest of their bodies that they can no longer produce tears. Further symptoms of melancholy singled out by Arcolani are intense restlessness and misanthropy, the latter trait prompting its sufferers to seek escape into solitary seclusion. But while desirous of avoiding the company of live human beings, Arcolani noted, melancholics do not seem to feel the same about dead ones, since they can often be observed hanging around cemeteries where they hide during the day and come out only at night. “And all of this,” attested Arcolani, “causes them to enjoy solitude and their separation from the congregation of men.”²

A contemporary of Arcolani with comparable medical training, Giovanni da Concorreggio (d. ca. 1440), put this misanthropic symptom of melancholy in still balder terms. “It is the property of all melancholics,” proclaimed Concorreggio in his *Practica nova*, “to dis-

² Giovanni Arcolani (= Giovanni d'Arcole), *Practica . . . particularium morborum omnium* (Venice: Ex officina Valgrisia, 1560), cap. 16, pp. 49–50. On this tract see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 92n, 94n. For the social ramifications of this notion in the context of late medieval and Renaissance medical theory see Rosen, *Madness in Society* (see above note), ch. 4, pp. 139 ff.

play hatred toward human life, to flee the society of human beings, and to be in a continuous state of sorrow and fear.”³ Conversely, solitude was charged by medical writers like Arcolani and Concorreggio with inducing melancholy in its lonely resident. In short, melancholy was commonly depicted by the medical writers as both a cause and an effect of the solitary recluse’s way of life. The melancholy suffering of the solitary, as depicted by observers of the human condition like these, is both a result of his solitary musings and a force driving him into solitude in the first place, where it is greatly exacerbated.

While hard-pressed to find in all of this any justification for a solitary way of life, we can readily find in it a contrary justification of diligent civic engagement, the salutary antidote to a melancholy detachment from society. In this regard the Renaissance medical writers can be said to be not only *descriptive* in their presentation of the melancholic syndrome, but also *prescriptive*. That is to say, as viewed from the characteristically normative position occupied by the medical profession, the regimen geared to cure melancholy necessarily entails the counsel to rid oneself of the external conditions, including the condition of excessive solitude, upon which melancholy feeds.

It is understandable, then, that in delivering both explicit and implicit warnings against inordinate solitary seclusion the Renaissance medical writers fell into common cause with the civic humanists, especially in the quattrocento when the humanist attacks on solitude were in a definitive upswing. The advice of the Paduan physician Antonio Gazio (1461–1528), inserted into a tract purporting to prescribe how one can live a long life, was as relevant to Renaissance moral philosophy as to Renaissance medicine. Wrote Gazio: “Let no man love leisure unless there is added to it labor (*Ocia nimia nullus amet nisi sint conjuncta labori*). For by excessive repose a man is corrupted.”⁴ It only remained for the humanist writers, in echo of this common-sense medical maxim, to identify corruptive “leisure” (*ocia*) with solitude and health-giving “labor” with active civic engagement.

Arcolani’s observation, found in conjunction with his portrayal of

³ Giovanni da Concorreggio, *Practica nova medicinae Joannis de Concoregio Mediolanensis* (Venice: Impresa mandato & sumptibus . . . Octaviani Scoti Modoetiensis, 1515), tract. I, cap. 23, fol. 14^r. On this tract see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 88n., 92n.

⁴ Antonio Gazio, *Florida corona, quae ad sanitatis hominum conservationem ac longevam vitam perducendam sunt per necessaria continens* (Lyons: Apud Scipionem de Gabiano, 1534), cap. 22, fol. 15^v.

the misanthropic dispositions of melancholics, that their hallucinations sometimes include one of being assailed by demons, also found considerable resonance among his fellow physicians. Thus the Padua-educated Michele Savonarola (1384–1464) included among the various signs of melancholy “a vision of demons, black monks, and other such things.”⁵ Of a like mind was Alessandro Benedetti (d. 1525), who observed that melancholics, “being exceedingly timid, stupified, wretched, and tearful, seek out dark and solitary places, under which conditions they imagine themselves to be vexed by demons.”⁶ Especially prone to this form of melancholy, according to the Paduan physician Bartolomeo Montagnana (d. 1460), were those incited by the enkindled, “manic” form of melancholy termed adust by the medical writers. As noted by Montagnana, “no one is ever called a demoniac or maniac except when he becomes infirm through that melancholy which has been born from adust.”⁷

An intellectual discipline sometimes combining with medicine to underscore the corruptive influence of melancholy on human behavior is astrology, the theorists of which generally assigned the instigation of unfavorable traits like the above to the planet Saturn. Aptly illustrating the way of thinking behind this collaboration of disciplines was Guido Bonatti (d. ca. 1300), a contemporary of Dante (1265–1321). Among the seven planets, wrote Bonatti, Saturn “signifies melancholy among the humors, and likewise melancholy among the complexions.” This melancholic influence of Saturn, Bonatti continued, extends both to body and to mind, with its outstanding corporeal effect being enervative languor and its corresponding psychological effect, “a slowness, labor, and affliction of the mind, together with evil thoughts (*malas cogitationes*).”⁸ Brought into con-

⁵ Michele Savonarola, *Practica major* (Venice: Juntas, 1547), tract. VI, cap. 1, rub. 11, fol. 67^r. On Michele, a grandfather of the more famous Florentine prophet-statesman Giovanni, see Thorndike, *Magic*, ch. 46, pp. 173 ff.

⁶ Alessandro Benedetti, *Singulis corporum morbis a capite ad pedes* (Venice: In officina Lucae Antonii Juntae, 1533), cap. 38, p. 35. Benedetti taught and practiced at Verona.

⁷ Bartolomeo Montagnana, *Consilia CCCV*. . . (Venice: Apud Gasparem Bindonum, 1565), cons. 47, fol. 71^r.

⁸ Guido Bonatti, *De astronomia tractatus X*. . . , Basel: 1550, tract. III, cap. 1, cols. 98–9. On this tract see also Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 189–90. Dante, who was well aware of Bonatti, consigned him to Hell (*Inferno*, XXX, 118) for illicitly dipping into the occult arts. For a summary of Renaissance astrology see Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, ch. 1, pp. 1 ff., and for a fuller query into its central place in Renaissance thought, especially in conjunction with magical and Hermetic studies, Eugenio Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance: The Zodiac of Life*, trans. Carolyn Jackson, June Allen, and Clare Robertson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

junction with the healing arts, this is an outlook which resulted in the discipline of astrological medicine, the theorists of which, in their quest for regimens to human infirmity, joined salutary planetary influences to their terrestrial ones. But even short of a full-fledged merging of astrology with medicine, the late medieval and early Renaissance medical writers generally agreed that the planets occultly participated to some degree both in diseases and in their cures.

The foregoing are symptoms of melancholy about which there is little good to say. If we were to leave the matter here, the affliction triggered by an excess of the black bile would pose little more problem for the historian of ideas than any other corporeal infirmity addressed by the physicians. But most of the Renaissance medical and astrological writers did not leave the matter here. Generally scattered among symptoms of melancholy like these, bespeaking of a highly undesirable state of mental alienation, are other symptoms which are not so unqualifiably unwanted. Indeed, they seem to suggest, far from a state of corporeal and psychological debilitation, a kind of rare physical or mental agility and prowess traditionally referred to heroes and men of exceptional genius. These admirable effects, likewise relating to aberrant effects of melancholy on the imagination, suggest that the objective of the physician need not necessarily be a single-minded one of seeking melancholy's removal from his patient. For if we are to take seriously these potentially invigorating powers of the melancholy humor, it would appear that the goal of the physician should be not so much to *eradicate* as to *regulate* melancholy so that it can better fulfill its God-given role as a material aid for the enhancement of human genius.

For this genial seed of melancholy to come to full flower, as will be the task of the following chapters to demonstrate, there would be necessary a philosophical reconstruction of the melancholy doctrine so that it could break out of the restrictive norms imposed upon it by the traditional medical, humanist, and theological traditions. Here it will be our task to indicate how the Renaissance medical tradition, already influenced to some degree by the philosophical doctrines of antiquity, reveals an underlying fault line separating two contradictory approaches to melancholy which could conceivably contribute to a philosophical revision of its theory. The first approach is conditioned by the formal injunction of the physician to cure melancholy, and the second approach, by the acknowledgment of the physician that melancholics are endowed with certain admirable genial traits which would appear more in need of cultivating than curing.

* * *

The late medieval Paduan physician Pietro d'Abano (1250–1316), like his contemporary Bonatti immersed in the science of astrology, agreed with Bonatti in deeming the melancholy complexion to be governed by the planet Saturn. The coldness and dryness of melancholics, D'Abano determined, can be explained by the susceptibility of their complexion to a cold and dry planet, and their sluggishness to the fact that their ruling celestial body, with the longest interval around the earth, is also the slowest.⁹ However, a further aspect of D'Abano's conception of the saturnine condition is not so easily explained by this kind of assessment. For if Saturn, the cold, dry, and slow planet, induces cold, dry, and sluggish characteristics in those over whom it rules, we are hard put to explain D'Abano's coexisting presumption that certain more dynamic characteristics of melancholics—those ascribed to human genius—can be referred to the identical celestial cause.

This revised reading of melancholy of course depended not only upon a reassessment of the cold and dry humor, but also upon a reassessment of the the cold and dry saturnine planet to which, so it was commonly assumed, the melancholy humor was occultly subject. Poetically heralding this revaluation of Saturn was Dante, who in his *Paradiso* (cant. 21) located in its outermost planetary sphere such foremost Christian contemplatives as St. Benedict and St. Peter Damian.¹⁰ Furnishing a picture of contemplative genius like that

⁹ Pietro d'Abano (= Petrus Aponensis), *Conciliator controversiarum, quae inter philosophos et medicos versantur* (Venice: Apud Juntas, 1565), dif. 32, fol. 132^v, col. 2: "... melancholia proportionetur saturno ratione frigiditatis, & siccitatis, motusque tardi. . . Sic & melancholia longum habet intervallum. . . ." On D'Abano, popularly dubbed the Conciliator after this work, see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1934, 1966), II, 874 ff. Unlike Bonatti, D'Abano happily managed to escape Dante's notice in the *Inferno*, most likely because his astrological speculations were not so obviously bound up with operations in the art of magic.

¹⁰ Dante's principal source for this revaluation of Saturn's effects was Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis* (Venice: Apud Hier. Scotum, 1570), lib. I, cap. 12: "Quomodo anima ex superiore mundi parte ad inferna hec delabatur," pp. 59 ff. (at p. 62). For a modern ed. of this work see Macrobius, *Ciceronis somnium Scipionis cum commentariis*, in *Opera*, Vol. I, ed. Ludovicus Janus (Quedlinburg/Leipzig: Godofredi Bassii, 1848), with relevant passage at p. 74. On this reference see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 255, and on the key role of the early Neoplatonists in showing the way to this reassessment of Saturn, pp. 155 ff. On Dante's wider treatment of the Saturn motif see Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Saturn in Dante," in Massimo

imagined by Dante with a humoral *causa materialis* was D'Abano—this with dependency partially on the medical traditions and partially on the philosophical traditions of Aristotle prevailing in the schools of his day. Needless to say, if such a revaluation of melancholy were to be credibly received, there needed to be supplied a critical element missing in the original conception of the cold and dry humor. This D'Abano found in the principle of enkindlement. For only through the enkindlement of this initially cold but intrinsically combustible humor was the conception of an ostensibly phlegmatic-like and debilitating melancholy capable of being turned into a distinctive mark of human genius.

In D'Abano, it is true, the conception of genial melancholy still lay in inchoate form, as when, in his *Conciliator*, he related the remarkable case of an ignorant woman who, under the force of her melancholy, spoke fluent Latin but lost her linguistic ability the moment she was cured.¹¹ One possible relevance of this anecdote was to the witch question, raising as it did the question of whether it was a demon that truly spoke Latin through the linguistically facile melancholy woman or merely her natural melancholy mistakenly confused by observers with demonic agents. But another more favorable reading of D'Abano's anecdote was also possible, reflecting a strain of the medical traditions that a text popularly ascribed to the authorship of Aristotle, the *Problemata*, put in cogent philosophical terms. This is the presumption that, inasmuch as melancholy is nearly always found in conjunction with genius, it somehow plays a causative role in the effectuation of genius. For it was a basic premise of the spuriously attributed author of the *Problemata*, as brought out in section XXX,1, that melancholics are more inclined to genius than the usual run of human beings.¹²

Ciavolella and Amilcare A. Iannucci, eds. *Saturn from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, University of Toronto Italian Studies, no. 8 (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions Inc., 1992), pp. 51–65.

¹¹ D'Abano, *Conciliator*, dif. 37, fol. 50^v, col. 2.

¹² According to Thorndike, *Magic*, II, 877, D'Abano, during an extended stay in Constantinople, "discovered a volume of the *Problems* of Aristotle, which he translated into Latin for the first time." For evidence that Thorndike later changed his mind in this regard, however, see his article "Peter of Abano and Another Commentary on the Problems of Aristotle," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 29 (1955), 517–23, maintaining that the real translator was Bartolomeo da Messina. Concerning a commentary by D'Abano on the Aristotelian *Problemata* (1310), presumably based on the Bartolomeo da Messina translation, see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*,

The thesis that melancholy enables certain individuals to bypass formal training in language was reiterated by the early quattrocento physician Antonio Guainerio (d. 1440), who inquired in this connection “why certain melancholy illiterates are thereby made literates?” But uncanny ability in language was only one of the more astonishing genial traits conceded to melancholy by Guainerio. Another was the ability to foretell the future with remarkable accuracy.¹³ Further serving to underscore the genial nature of melancholy for the early Renaissance medical writers, cogently illustrated by Michele Savonarola, was its reputed ability to provoke powers of aesthetic creativity.

Examples of such melancholically provoked artists, noted Savonarola, are certain singers and instrumentalists who refuse to make music “unless they first are moved by their phantasies.” These and other kinds of artists, Savonarola continued, deemed “eccentrics” (*bizarios*) by many, in truth are imaginatively stimulated melancholics. Accordingly, the proposition gaining ever greater popularity that “no one can be an excellent artisan unless he is vexed to some degree by *bizaria*” is also alternatively expressible as the proposition that “those who are excellent in some art, even as they are held by the vulgar to lack prudence in some degree, are assuredly observed to possess something of melancholy.” In making this case, however, Savonarola cautioned that what is of a marked advantage for the creative arts is of a marked disadvantage for analytical arts like his own discipline of medicine. For whereas melancholic eccentricity can be of benefit to imaginative artists, Savonarola allowed, it is of no possible aid to those who, like the physicians, are more in need of lucid analysis than of imaginative meanderings like those promoted by

p. 68. For the text of the *Problemata*, XXX,1, in parallel columns of the original Greek and an English translation, see pp. 18–29. The authors of this study contend (p. 41) that the *Problemata*'s likely true author was Theophrastus, who presented its speculations under his master's name. As will be evident in the following pages, however, this tract, encouraged by D'Abano's commentary, came to be generally accepted as a genuine work from the Stagyrite's hand.

¹³ Antonio Guainerio, *Practica* (Milan: Octaviani Scoti, 1497), tract 15, cap. 4: “Quare illiterati quidam melancholici litterati facti sunt, et qualiter etiam ex his aliqui future perdicunt,” fols. 23^v–24^r. On this query by Guainerio see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 95. So basic has Schleiner found this predictive attribute to be in the “Aristotelian” version of melancholy that he states in his *Melancholy*, p. 29: “Thus foresight and divination can be considered as the distinguishing features of genial melancholy. . . .”

heated melancholy. For this reason, insisted Savonarola, "from the fault of *bizarria* the excellent physician must be completely free."¹⁴

The foregoing admissions of a genial dimension to melancholy by representatives of the late medieval and early Renaissance medical traditions, it is clear, rested on more than a strictly medical assessment of the subject. They also rested on a philosophical assessment brought to a head in a text errantly ascribed to Aristotle, the *Problemata*. The pseudonymous ancient author of this text was clearly versed in the medical theories of his day. We should not be surprised to find, accordingly, a reciprocal disposition by the medical theorists to find in the *Problemata* philosophical confirmation of genial characteristics which they may have independently observed through their medical investigations. Much as the Aristotelian theory of genial melancholy exerted philosophical influence on its medical rendition as a pathological state, so did the medical diagnosis of melancholy inversely exert influence on its philosophical rendition as an instigator of genial powers of mind. Coming into what might be termed a symbiotic relationship, Hippocratic-Galenic medicine and Aristotelian philosophy effectively joined forces in forging a theory of genius located within rather than above finite nature.

Even more problematic than the union of Galen and Aristotle in the reciprocal interplay between medicine and philosophy was the entrance of Plato into the mix. For if it is true, as a Galenic maxim has it, that "the character of the mind follows the temperaments of the body,"¹⁵ it logically follows that genius, representing as it does the culminating potential of the human mind, is likewise explicable in terms of the corporeal temperaments. Sometimes serving to reinforce this naturalist legacy of the jointly Galenic-Aristotelian traditions was the authority of a medieval Arabic physician who, it so happened, was as conversant with philosophy as with medicine. He was Avicenna (= Ibn Sina, 980–1037), who joined the other major medieval commentators of Aristotle in amalgamating Neoplatonic supernaturalist with Aristotelian naturalist principles.¹⁶

¹⁴ Savonarola, *Speculum phisionomiae*, ms. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 7357), fol. 55^v, col. 1, cited in Thorndike, *Magic*, IV, 196n.

¹⁵ This maxim is employed by Galen as a title for one of his tracts, *Liber quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur*, in *Opera omnia*, IV, pp. 767 ff.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Émile Bréhier, *The Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, trans. Wade Baskin (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1931, 1965), p. 92: "Arab philosophy, to the

Nevertheless, even as Avicenna participated in the general Arabic infusion of Aristotelian natural philosophy by Neoplatonic mysticism, including a belief in demons and angels, a major effect of his influence on subsequent writers, fostered by his empirical observations as a physician, was to restrict the areas in which demons and angels could work in human affairs. Or put another way, a significant impact of Avicenna on this issue for subsequent generations was to reinforce Aristotelian naturalism by appeal, not principally to philosophical principles, but to the kind of operational, or pragmatic, skepticism that is intrinsic to the role of the corporeal physician. The dilemma of the physicians, *qua* physicians, was that no matter how sympathetic they might be to the alienated state of melancholy they were describing, their medical training dictated that they seek, not its promotion as a mark of genius, but its cure. This dilemma is underscored by Michele Savonarola's concession of melancholy to certain musicians reputedly belonging to the category *bizarios*, notwithstanding that music was customarily treated by the physicians as an effective medical regimen for melancholy; as Avicenna had pointed out in this regard, "music is naturally able to help in assuaging the melancholic juices—this even if they should be incited by a demon."¹⁷

Short of jumping track from physics to metaphysics, the medical writers were compelled by the normative exigencies of their profession to look upon all forms of melancholy, genial melancholy included, as a pathological cause of human debilitation. The dilemma of the physicians, as we will now see, is further brought out by a particular species of melancholy to which they often addressed themselves, namely, that triggered by the passion of love. For the psychic alienation showing up under the heading of love melancholy in the medical tracts, especially as it was made applicable by their authors to the love for higher forms of wisdom and beauty, reveals a genial aspect within the melancholy humor bearing essential kinship with

extent that it followed the Greeks, was essentially a Neo-Platonic interpretation of the whole of Aristotle's work." Cf. Kristeller, *Sources*, pp. 34–35: ". . . the Neoplatonists themselves were committed to a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle . . . the Arabs inherited Aristotle from the Neoplatonic tradition of late antiquity, and consequently their understanding of Aristotle was affected by Neoplatonic interpretations and accretions which they were never able to eliminate completely."

¹⁷ Avicenna, *Canon medicinae, ex Gerardi Cremonsis versione, & Andreae Alpagi Bellunensis castigatione*, 2 vols. (Venice: Apud Juntas, 1595) fen. I, tract. 4, cap. 18. For an historical account of the musical remedy for melancholy see Günter Bandmann, *Melancholie und Musik* (Köln/Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960).

the aforementioned powers of extraordinary mystical, prophetic, and poetic insight.

* * *

During the Italian quattrocento a writer on the subject of love, Ugolino della Casa (15th cent.), responded as follows to an imagined lovelorn acquaintance. "What is it that so suddenly has taken hold of you?," he inquired of the languishing lover, noting that "formerly you were friendly with us, speaking and chattering with both questions and answers, whereas now, no longer wishing to converse or concern yourself with us, you have become melancholic (*melanconico*)."¹⁸ Passages like this by the Renaissance love theorists suggest their conversance with the medical texts, which, as illustrated by Della Casa, generally relegated love sickness to the larger category of melancholy.

Many Renaissance medical writers, on entering into the subject of love melancholy, conveyed an ancient play on the Greek word for love, *eros*, which was decisive for the way it was to be treated in the general literature. For merely by aspirating the *e* in *eros*, the writer could transform the word into *heros*, the equivalent of the Italian word "eroe" and English word "hero;" thence arose on the basis of a mere linguistic coincidence, first in medical circles and then spreading to wider literary circles, the idea of "heroic love." To help justify this melding of what in truth were two separately generated notions, love and heroicism, the medical writers touching on this species of melancholy could point up what they perceived to be an inner affiliation between the passionate choler of the ancient heroes and the passionate melancholy of lovers, their nexus consisting of the principle of humoral enkindlement. In establishing this nexus the medical theorists anticipated a primary theme of the genial theory brought to a head by the Florentine Platonists, whereby the ravishing aspirations of the melancholy hero were transferrable to the philosophical lovers of wisdom and the poetic and artistic lovers of beauty.

The history of this medical notion is traceable to pre-Renaissance times, as when, for example, the eleventh century Salerno physician-turned-monk Constantine the African (= Constantinus Africanus,

¹⁸ Ugolino della Casa, *Amore dispetto per costanza* (Bologna: Presso l'Editore Gaetano Romagnoli, 1880), pp. 23-24.

1010–1085) recognized as a particular species of melancholy “love called *hereos*, . . . in which black choler and insanity dominate.”¹⁹ Indeed, so prominent was the role that this species of melancholy played in Constantine’s medical thinking that it effectively intruded into his overall view of melancholy. Thus, detecting the presence of unrequited love at the very heart of melancholy, Constantine declared that the sorrow that is one of its two primary ingredients (along with fear) results from “the loss of a thing very beloved (*rei multum amatae amissio*).”²⁰ With the further help of Constantine’s Arabic contemporary Avicenna, who termed the identical form of alienation *ilisci*,²¹ representatives of the later Italian medical tradition determined the symptoms of Constantine’s *hereos* to issue out of frustrated efforts to achieve perfect union with the object of one’s love and a persisting obsession to achieve that union.

As typically depicted by the medieval and Renaissance medical writers, love melancholy is a condition of effervescent exhilaration which, following the failure of the lover to obtain the object of his desire, is immediately followed by profound depression and sorrow. As to how passionate ebullience might be obtained from an inherently cold humor, the medical writers could answer that, being also of an inherently combustible nature, the melancholy humor is sub-

¹⁹ Constantine the African (= Constantinus Africanus), *Viaticum*, in *Opera* (Basel: Apud Henricum Petrum, 1539), cap. 20, p. 18. While this 1539 Basel ed. terms love melancholy *amor qui dicitur eros*, I am here reflecting a citation of the identical text excerpted by John Livingston Lowes from what he considered to be the authoritative Lyons ed. of 1510, “The Loveres Maladye of Hereos,” *Modern Philology*, XI (1914), 491–546 (at p. 515). Concerning the difficulty in sorting out Constantine’s original medical writings from his translations of Arabic treatises, esp. those of the tenth cent. physician Ibn Eddjazzar (d. ca. 1004), see part I of Donald A. Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, eds., trans. Jacques Ferrand: *A Treatise on Lovesickness* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 67–68, and p. 185n; as pointed out in the intro. to this tract, p. 67, “Ibn Eddjazzar’s term for excessive love was translated as *hereos* by Constantinus. . . .” Cf. Ciavolella, “Eros and the Phantasms of *Hereos*,” in Beecher and Ciavolella, *Eros and Anteros: The Medical traditions of Love in the Renaissance*, University of Toronto Italian Studies, 9 (Toronto: Dovehouse, 1992), pp. 75–85 (at p. 78). For the heavy reliance of Constantine on the ancient Greek physician Rufus of Ephesus (fl. second century A.D.) see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 49. The attribution of this and subsequent passages to Constantine himself is not intended to sidestep the question of their true authorship, but only to present Constantine as a foremost medieval vehicle for conveying the ideas indicated into the Renaissance.

²⁰ Constantine, *De melancholia*, lib. I, in *Opera*, p. 280.

²¹ See, e.g., Avicenna’s *Canon medicinae*, lib. III, Fen. I, tract. IV, cap. 24, pp. 494 ff. On this Avicennan concept see Lowes, “Loveres Maladye,” pp. 21 ff.

ject to enkindlement from an outside source. Concerning what the external source of enkindlement might be, the medical theorists reasoned that, much as hot choler incited the ancient heroes, the hot sanguine humor is capable of inciting "heroic" lovers.

Further encouraging the association of choleric heroic and sanguine love melancholy for the medical writers was a passage of the Aristotelian *Problemata* declaring, on the analogy of physiological inebriation, that "Dionysius and Aphrodite are rightly said to belong together, and most melancholy persons are lustful."²² In addition, the same author had contributed to the notion of "heroic love" from another vantage point. For by pointing up the vulnerability of such ancient tragic heroes as Ajax and Hercules to heated melancholy, he had helped to prepare the way for the commonly stated proposition that melancholy is the "heroic affection."²³ Encouraged by their own assumed linguistic affiliation between the words "love" (*eros*) and "hero" (*heros*), the Renaissance medical writers could thereby readily associate the *affectio heroica* with the melancholy of lovers who, they surmised on the model of the ancient heroes, exert their amorous passions beyond ordinary human limits.

Illustrating the transference of the anciently derived notion of heroic love to its early Renaissance setting are several quattrocento medical writers previously treated in related matters. Two features of love melancholy in particular can be elicited from these writers causing it to be especially applicable to a genial theory. The first is a thwarted drive of melancholy lovers to achieve intimacy with the object of their desires, and the second, their propensity to seek out solitary seclusion so that they might meditate on their beloved free of work-a-day distractions

In the first of these respects, for example, Guainerio devoted an entire section of his *Practica* to *hereos*, defining it as "a continuous imagination pertaining to a beloved object."²⁴ A few decades later

²² Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 21-22.

²³ See, e.g., Phavorinus Varinus (= Guarino of Favera), *Dictionarium . . . magnum . . . multis varisque ex autoribus collectum, totius linguae graecae commentarium* (Basel: R. Winter, 1538), "melancholia." Cf. Giambattista della Porta, *De humana physiognomia libri III* (Naples: Apud Josephum Cacchium, 1586), lib. I, cap. 8, p. 14: "Phavorinus hanc affectionem heroicam vocat." For this citation see also Schleiner, *Melancholy*, p. 51. Phavorinus, bishop of Nocera Camelana, was a lexiconist of the Greek language.

²⁴ Guainerio, *Practica*, tract. XV, cap. 13, fol. 27^r.

Arcolani wrote in the same connection: "That which is called *ilisci* or *heros* is melancholic solicitude in which a man exerts all his thoughts upon the beauty of certain forms and figures, and is compelled by a vehement desire to pursue them."²⁵ Likewise holding that the philological resemblance between the Greek words for love and hero is no coincidence was Michele Savonarola, who characterized the condition a "melancholic solicitude" (*sollicitudo melancholica*). Those in the grasp of this anxiety, Savonarola continued, "being so disposed from a disordered love, are in a state of continuous thought, memory, and imagination." But not everyone, Savonarola hastened to add, is equally subject to this melancholic state of amorous solicitude. Those succumbing to its afflictive powers, he maintained, are often the noblest that humanity has to offer. "This passion," declared Savonarola, "is called by many *haereos*, because it more frequently befalls heroic or noble men."²⁶

As these medical writers also often pointed out, moreover, the *sollicitudo melancholica* experienced by frustrated lovers generally found in solitude the optimal conditions for its nurturing. Just as melancholics in general tend to seek solace in solitary seclusion, as Arcolani took note, likewise do the special kinds of melancholics suffering from unfulfilled amorousness "seek out solitude and separation from men."²⁷ In similar fashion pointing up this solitude-seeking feature of lovers was the Pavian physician Giammeteo Ferrari da Grado (d. 1472), who declared that he who is under the sway of heroic love "flees the conversation of men and seeks out lonely places among the sepulchres of the dead where, feeding upon his solitary melancholy, he might perpetually meditate upon the beauty of certain forms."²⁸

In both of these regards—an inordinate will to achieve union with one's beloved and the choice of solitary detachment to brood over an inability to arrive at amorous completion—it required little stretch of the imagination to extend the concept of melancholy love from earthly to heavenly concerns, that is, from an unfulfilled desire for a terrestrial object of beauty to desire for a beautiful heavenly object.

²⁵ Arcolani, *Practica*, cap. 16, p. 50.

²⁶ Savonarola, *Practica major*, tract. VI, cap. 1, rubr. 14, fol. 69^r. See also Lowes, "Loveres Maladye," pp. 532–3.

²⁷ Arcolani, *Practica*, cap. 16, p. 50.

²⁸ Giammeteo Ferrari da Grado, *Practica seu commentaria in nonum Rasis ad Almansorem* (Venice: Juntas, 1560), cap. 11, fol. 52^r.

In a word, love melancholy was readily transformable into religious melancholy. Typifying this view was Arcolani, who maintained that the melancholy lover's sense of "separation from his beloved object" (*elongatio a re amata*) can as easily apply to a spiritual as to a terrestrial object of desire. Reported Arcolani, love-sick melancholics sometimes speak of their passion as divine "because they believe that it issues from God."²⁹ Concerning the allied quest for solitary solace on the part of religious lovers, Constantine the African, who himself eventually opted for an enclôstered way of life, heralded a commonplace Renaissance view by conceding that monks were among those pre-eminently subject to melancholy. "We perceive many religious solitaries revered for their good lives," attested Constantine, "who fall into this [melancholic] passion out of the fear of God, out of anxiety about the Last Judgment, and out of a rapacious desire to enjoy the Highest Good."³⁰ Following the same reasoning within its quattrocento setting, though obviously with less sympathy toward the plight being described, Michele Savonarola, after reiterating a popular maxim that "Venus loves idleness" (*ocia Venus amat*), observed that many sufferers of love melancholy are to be found among "the solitary, the continent, and the religious, because they lead their lives in idleness."³¹

There is also a form of love to consider which can be construed as an intellectualized version of religious love. It is the love of learning, rationalized by medieval and Renaissance intellectuals as love for those arts and sciences dubbed the "handmaidens" of theology. Constantine also anticipated this characteristic Renaissance theme, pointing out in his treatise on melancholy that many prone to the disease under consideration "are always intent in their studies, as in reading philosophical books and the like;" these, he explained, are vulnerable to melancholy "by reason of their investigation of science, of the weariness of their memory, of sorrow arising from the defect of their souls, and of the overexertion of trying to achieve the thoroughgoing completion of their goals." But in his adumbration of this Renaissance theme Constantine also implied that melancholy attraction to solitude was motivated by something more dynamic than, as

²⁹ Arcolani, *Practica*, cap. 16, p. 50.

³⁰ Constantine, *De melancholia*, lib. I, in *Opera*, p. 283. For a more extensive translation of this passage see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 84.

³¹ Savonarola, *Practica major*, tract. VI, cap. 1, rubr. 14, fol. 69^r.

Michele Savonarola was to put it four centuries later, a mere desire for idleness. Citing Hippocrates as his authority that “thought is the exertion of the soul” (*animae labor est cogitatio*), the solitude-prone Constantine noted that, just as excessive corporeal exertion can cause disease, “so can exertion of the soul cause it to succumb to melancholy.”³² Under the force of reasoning like this the concept of “heroic love” could be applied not only to an overweening love of books like that given popular currency by the *Philobiblon* of the fourteenth century English writer Richard of Bury, but also be applied to the overweening love of the knowledge contained in those books.³³ If the condition of those so afflicted displayed symptoms shared with another condition also commonly treated by the physicians, phlegmatic languor, its cause lay at the opposite pole from the cause of phlegmatic enervation, resulting as it did, not from falling too low in the scale of what is knowable, but from reaching too high.

While a physician like Constantine clearly had absorbed something of the Aristotelian revaluation of melancholy into his treatment of its causes and symptoms, it was his obligation, in his capacity as a physician, to seek the cure of melancholy in a patient regardless of its cause. His medically trained Renaissance successors were faced with the same obligation. Their prescriptive view of the human condition stood at loggerheads, as it were, with the genial conception to which the Aristotelian author of the *Problemata* appealed when he spoke of the many “heroes” of the ages who had become afflicted by melancholy. Though naming physically active types among these heroic melancholics, such as Hercules, Lysander, Ajax, and Bellerophon, the author of the *Problemata* also included in the ranks of these eminent melancholics such “heroes of the mind” as Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato.³⁴

If Aristotle posed a perplexing problem in this regard for the Renaissance physicians, even more so did the last-named in the preceding list of illustrious ancient melancholics, Plato, who, with Socrates his mouthpiece, had shown the way in his *Symposium* to how love madness could be transformed into a highly desirable passion. We

³² Constantine, *De melancholia*, lib. I, in *Opera*, pp. 283–4. On these passages see also Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 84–5.

³³ Lowes, “Loveres Maladye,” pp. 38 ff.

³⁴ See Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 18–9.

have yet to address the larger philosophical issue here, which revolves around the Platonic revival taking place under the auspices of Marsilio Ficino at Florence in the later quattrocento. Here it is sufficient to point out that, on the subject of amorous alienation, Plato as much as Aristotle placed the Renaissance medical theorists in a discomforted position. It followed for the medical theorists that, once they had introduced the same motif in their speculations about "heroic love," they were stuck with the dilemma of attempting to expunge a physiological and psychological condition from their patients characteristic of those popularly said to possess extraordinary powers of mind.

So far as the philosophical traditions can be said to have played a consequential role in enhancing the moderating palliatives of Renaissance medicine, it was more in their capacity as arbiters of normative conduct than as rationalizers of genial exceptions to such conduct. Among those traditions, most eminently helpful in furnishing intellectual justification of medicine's primary calling was Stoicism, calling for the imposition of reason on the passions, and certain strains of Platonism and Aristotelianism, one entreating the "musical" harmonization of mind and body, and the other, a principle of moderation of the passions in conjunction with a stern warning against excessive solitary isolation where the melancholy-inducing imagination is most likely to exceed its proper rational bounds. Other strains of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, however, as will be extensively spelled out in the following chapters, would prove to be less compatible with the prescriptive needs of corporeal medicine, allowing as they did, on the model of the ancient heroes, a genial exception to moderating constraints imposed by reason on the imagination. So far as the medical writers acknowledged a theory of genial melancholy, this was an incidental philosophical concession within a larger prescriptive framework. As such it was more notable for hemming the general run of men into the world by standardized rules of living than for offering a way out of the life circumscribed by those rules for a genial few.

* * *

Within the strict boundaries of their professions, then, the physicians needed to concern themselves exclusively with the natural causes of melancholic alienation. It required a metaphysical leap of sorts to move from its natural to its supernatural causes. A direct issue of

this metaphysical-theological leap, for which a Platonic intrusion into the Aristotelian system bears prime responsibility, was the legacy of demonology. For it was a popular presupposition of the demonologists that a natural receptacle especially favored by the demons for their admission into the human soul is the melancholy humor.

While agreeing with the philosophical proposition that melancholy contains certain supernaturally generated genial elements, the theologians, as we will now establish, were of the opinion that these owe to a diabolical origin. Yet there also lay implanted in this theological outlook, as in the accompanying medical one, the seeds of a more favorable view of melancholy genius, the reasoning being that if demons are able to utilize the melancholy humor for their ignominious ends, all the more surely is God able to utilize melancholy for the exalted end of coaxing human souls into Heaven. All that would be needed to make this reversal complete, to be brought out in the next chapter, was the philosophical melding by the Florentine Platonists of the Aristotelian doctrine of genial melancholy with the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy.

Demonology, as we will further see, represented but one theological specialty to throw up a major barrier to a full-fledged doctrine of melancholy genius. Another specialty was the formulation of a method proposing to counter demonic insinuation into human affairs through a program of solitary spiritual exercises. One significant cultural response to the recognition of melancholy's potentially injurious effects during the early Renaissance, to be brought out in the concluding section of this chapter, is the humanist one counseling both avoidance of melancholy-inducing—and, therefore, demon-attracting—solitude and the bridling of the aspiring will by the principle of moderation. But another response to the same recognition, at odds with the humanist plea for civic engagement but in agreement on a need to rein in the human mind from overweening aspirations, is rather to attempt a resolution to the problem of melancholy in the context of the *vita solitaria et contemplativa* itself. The proponents of this view, the religious mystics, being mindful of the threat posed by melancholy-loving demons to what they deemed to be their divinely inspired raptures, were just as attuned to melancholy's dangers as their civic counterparts. What distinguishes their approach to melancholy is their belief that it is effectively eradicated, not through civic engagement as certain of the humanists prescribed, but through a

methodical program of spiritual exercises performed in solitary withdrawal from the civic body.

Also to be brought out in this regard, moreover, complicating a picture of melancholy by the theologians as a wholly deleterious agent of the Devil, is a certain ambivalence they sometimes displayed suggesting that the black humor might be of use for something other than attracting evil spirits. Much as we will see some of the early Renaissance humanists, quite independently of the Florentine Platonic revival, occasionally owning up to a dual character of melancholy permitting it to be applied to good as well as to ill, so will we now see a similar ambivalence toward melancholy displayed by the early Renaissance mystical theorists. Just as Ficino and his disciples will be shown to employ medical and humanist theory as a springboard to their doctrine of divinely inspired genius, so will the same tack be demonstrated with respect to mystical theory, with the key consisting of Ficino's further amalgamation of the Aristotelian doctrine of genial melancholy with the Platonic doctrine of the *furor mysticus*, one of four primary species of the *furor divinus*.

B. *The Theological Perspective*

In the last volume of his monumental *History of Magic* Lynn Thorndike at last made explicit a connection between two separate strands of his study which he had often placed in tacit proximity in its prior pages without overtly articulating their inner kinship. "Melancholy and magic," wrote Thorndike, "had long been associated in the history of ideas." The "magic" of which Thorndike was thinking when he inscribed those words was demonic or black magic, as revealed in the sentence to follow that "those who sought a natural explanation for what others regarded as possession by demons found it in an excess of melancholic humor."³⁵ In taking stock of the attempts by

³⁵ Thorndike, *Magic*, VIII, ch. 37: "Mental Disease and Magic," pp. 503 ff., opening sentences. Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 170, following a distinction made by the Spanish theologian Martin del Rio, opposes the category of a truly supernatural miracle to "the category of the 'preternatural' to account for prodigious effects that seemed supernatural or miraculous only because they were natural in a wider than familiar sense." On the basis of this distinction Clark observes, p. 265: "Visions,

some to reduce to natural melancholy a state of mental alienation which to others was caused by supernatural demons, however, Thorn-dike was also informed by his plethora of sources that we do not necessarily need to choose between the medical and theological diagnoses of melancholy. For being popularly stigmatized as the Devil's bath, melancholy could credibly be construed not so much as an alternative to the demonic explanation as its natural complement.

This did not mean, even for theologians, that it was always easy to determine whether demons were provoking melancholy phantasms or, contrarily, melancholy was provoking the phantasms of demons. For example, in a *Summa theologica* patterned after that of his great predecessor St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the Florentine Dominican St. Antonino (1379–1459) vehemently declaimed against what he termed a *passio melancholica* that, he maintained, “diminishes the judgment of reason.” Drawing on the physicians for its symptoms, Antonino related that melancholics, especially of the manic variety caused by excessive burning of the humor, display such erratic and irrational behavior as crying without cause, dancing instead of walking, fearing that if they are touched they will break, believing that they lack heads and carry frogs in their stomachs, and so on. But one feature of the eccentric conduct of melancholics brought out by Antonino is especially noteworthy in the present context. For many melancholics, Antonino further observed, “believe that they see or possess demons.”³⁶ Though implying that melancholics of the latter category were more victims of their own imaginations than of actual demons, St. Antonino did not entirely foreclose the possibility that the reverse was true, with demons provoking the unruly imagination of melancholics.

St. Antonino's treatment of melancholy illustrates how even the theologians of his day were sometimes at a loss in determining whether a given melancholic was imagining demons or was actually in the grasp of demons. Of the kinds of writings supportive of the

hallucinations, and dreams were the subject of constant discussion in medical literature. The effects of melancholy in particular, captured the interest of so many scholars in so many fields that they rank as one of the most talked-of topics of the age. Here, delusion was itself marvellous; what happened to melancholics was nothing if not preternatural.”

³⁶ Antonino of Florence (= Antoninus Florentinus), St., *Summa theologica in quatuor partes distributa* (Verona: Apud Augustinum Carattonium, 1740), pars I, tit. ii, cap. 6, col. 92.

latter view, none serves our purpose more directly and profitably than the demonological ones which were so instrumental in rationalizing the widespread persecution and execution of witches. Whereas some demonologists of Antonino's day, it is true, did not feel the need to make a radical choice between the naturalist and supernaturalist explanations for what they believed to be demonically induced behavior, maintaining as they did that demons are prone to seek out natural aids, other demonologists, mindful that melancholy can be invoked as an excuse for demonically instigated alienation, felt the need to preserve a clearcut distinction between the supernaturalist and naturalist explanations. The principle shared by both schools of demonologists is that the symptoms of demonic affliction outwardly resemble those of natural melancholy and can easily be confused with them by the undiscerning eye.

An early Italian example of a demonologist who expressly set out to distinguish demonic agitations from melancholy was the Milanese Dominican inquisitor Girolamo Visconti (d. ca. 1477), who pointed up what he perceived to be certain marked differences between the symptoms of melancholy and those of the demonically possessed. One such difference noted by Visconti is that, whereas "the melancholy humor should have been more the cause of the apparition of a sad thing than a cheerful one, inasmuch as the effects should be proportioned to the cause, the apparitions of this sect are more often pleasurable than sad." A further observation persuading Visconti that "the melancholy humor is not the cause of such visions" centered on two different ways in which melancholics and true demoniacs respond when summoned before an official tribunal. Whereas, Visconti attested with his own personal inquisitorial experience to back himself up, melancholics on being confronted by their accusers "speak foolish words in the presence of all and do not fear being punished," the case was quite different concerning those truly engaged in the demonic "sport" (*ludum*); these, upon being detected and summoned before their accusers, he maintained, become highly solicitous about the prospect of punishment "and refuse to reveal the secrets of their [demonic] diversions—unless, that is, they fear that they and their confederates will be indicted and bound over to the inquisitor."³⁷

³⁷ Girolamo Visconti (= Hieronymus Vicecomes), *Lamiarum sive striarum opusculum*. . . (Milan: Impressum Mediolani magistrum Leonerdum Pachel, 1490), cap. 1, fol. 20^v. Serving as Dominican provincial of Lombardy, Visconti was likely the

The tactic adopted by Visconti of distinguishing the symptoms of melancholy from those of demonic possession, however, was generally the exception rather than the rule among the demonologists. Their more usual approach was to relegate natural melancholy to the use of the demons, for which the Dominican cleric Sylvester Mazzolini (1460–1523) represents a typical case in point. On one hand Mazzolini conceded to the epistemological premise of the Aristotelians “that the origin of a phantasy, following a deed, is from the sense. For we are not able to imagine that which we have not in any manner discerned by the senses, either wholly or partially, just as a man born blind cannot imagine colors.” On the other hand, mindful of the impious reading which could conceivably be placed on this sensationalist rendering of the imagination, Mazzolini hastened to add that, “nevertheless, sometimes an act of phantasy is excited through impressions by diabolic movement, before they have been effected and preserved inwardly by the sense.” The agitation of the natural body humors, Mazzolini reasoned, “as is evident in phrenetics and melancholics,” might very well be but a natural effect responding to a supernaturally demonic cause.³⁸

Demonological texts like Mazzolini’s are a prominent avenue through which the thesis of melancholic mediation in the inculcation of diabolically instilled genius—the kind of genius popularly ascribed to witches and sorcerers—entered into the general thinking of the Renaissance period. In performing this function such texts reflected the prevailing attitudes of a continuous medieval demonological tradition out of which issued the notorious *Malleus maleficarum* playing a key role in encouraging the witch persecutions. In keeping with this tradition the demonologists walked a fine line between their own theological profession and that of corporeal medicine. Their typical disposition, the analysis of Visconti notwithstanding, was not to deny the presence of natural melancholy in demoniacs, but rather

unnamed inquisitor of Como held by the authors of the notorious *Malleus maleficarum* (1486) to be instrumental in the conviction and burning of numerous witches there. On Visconti see Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London: Peter Nevill, 1959), p. 525, and on the *Malleus*, pp. 337–39. For an English trans. of the latter tract see James Sprenger and Henry Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans., ed. Montague Summers (London: John Rodker, 1928). Cf. Cohn, *Inner Demons*, pp. 24 ff., and Kors and Peters, ed. *Witchcraft in Europe*, pp. 113 ff.

³⁸ Sylvester Mazzolini, *De strigimagarum daemonumve mirandis libri tres* (Rome: In aedibus Po. Ro., 1575), p. 118.

to emphasize the capacity of demoniacs, by virtue of a free will, to overcome their melancholy and thereby deny to the demons a propitious inroad for entrance into the world.

Nevertheless, even while turning an unequivocally hostile face to melancholy by reason of its reputed demon-attracting nature, the early Renaissance demonologists can be said to have helped prepare the way to a more favorable view of melancholy in spite of themselves. For by allowing that natural melancholy is capable of interacting with and mediating the deleterious afflations of supernatural demons, they also left open the possibility that it is also capable of interacting with the spiritually beneficial afflations sent down to the human being by God in the form of divine inspiration. Demonology, that is to say, represented the dark side of the proposition, to be carried to its apogee by Ficino's Florentine circle, that true genius is ultimately referable to a supernatural origin.

Given a major boost by St. Augustine (354–430) among the early Christian fathers, for whom evil spirits were a given in conjunction with the good spirits known as angels, the ideas of Plato managed to wend their way through medieval thought to help prepare the ground for Ficino's achievement. St. Thomas, carrying the medieval maxim "faith seeking understanding"—*fides quaerens intellectum*—to its systematic apogee, in the process can also be said to have added the philosophical authority of Aristotle to that of Plato in support of a demonological view of the world. For even as St. Thomas called principally on Aristotle to guide his scholastic program melding faith with discursive knowledge, he also inherited from his medieval fore-runners of the scholastic method a strong infusion of Platonism, anchored by a core doctrine of immortality of the soul but also riddled with demonology, to lend his Aristotelianism a firm supernatural foundation.

As previously noted, demonology represents but one of two theological specialties touching on the melancholy question, with another specialty represented by a theory of solitary mystical ascent through a pre-established program of spiritual exercises. The mystical theorists, we will now see, were as conceptually geared to take a stand against the disturbances of melancholy as their medical and humanist counterparts, with the crucial difference being that they considerably raised the stakes of melancholy's dangers by posing it, in its role as a favored demonic avenue, as a threat to the immortal soul as well as to the body and mind. It was the announced goal of the

Christian mystics to eliminate demonically incited disturbances from their beloved solitude by systematically purging the melancholy through which the demons found easy access. Yet in this case, too, as will also be brought out, the mystical theologians, by recognizing a place for melancholy in the beginnings of their upward spiritual journey even as they counseled its eradication at its conclusion, can be said to have planted a genial seed that would come to full fruition in the Ficinian doctrine of melancholy genius.

* * *

A Christian father who himself experienced a significant renaissance in the period after 1400, St. Jerome (d. 420), once allowed that some unhappy members of his beloved monastic profession succumbed to melancholy “from the humidity of their cells, and from immoderate fasting, and from the tedium of solitude, and from too much prayer reading which resounds day and night against their eardrums.” Such wretched figures, Jerome counseled, were more in need of “alleviations prescribed by Hippocrates” than of his own monastic-based warnings.³⁹ Later contemplatives and mystics working within Jerome’s monastically conditioned religious framework (including, as we have seen, the eleventh century physician-monk Constantine the African) saw no more problem in admitting the dangers of melancholy to their solitary way of life than in admitting the dangers of demonic assaults reputedly expedited by melancholy. The proper response to such melancholy as contemplatives found to be a recurring affliction of their profession, their theorists determined, was not to take leave of that profession; it was rather, in keeping with guidelines handed down to them by their monastic heritage, to purge themselves of melancholy, along with other hindrances to their divinely instituted vocation, through ordered stages of solitary spiritual elevation.

As will be amplified in the concluding section to this chapter, it was during the Italian quattrocento that there emerged a sufficiently compelling civic view of the human being—this through the agency of the humanist writers—as to place this position on an unprecedented defensive. The upshot was that a civic-solitary tension ear-

³⁹ St. Jerome, *Epistula*, no. 125, in Migne, PL XXII, col. 1082. Excerpt reprinted in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 76 note. On the Renaissance revival of Jerome see Eugene Rice, Jr., “The Renaissance Idea of Christian Antiquity: Humanist Patristic Scholarship,” in Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism*, I, 19–20.

lier kept in philosophical tow by St. Thomas, and, correlatively, in poetic tow by Dante, was carried to a breaking point. Though a solitary, following the famous Aristotelian paradox, might well occupy an inferior bestial level in the spiritual hierarchy, according to the "medieval" way of thinking illustrated by St. Thomas and Dante, he could just as well occupy a level transcending the ordinary natural limits of humanity.⁴⁰ Correlatively, in keeping with the same paradox: if melancholy can be detected in conjunction with the former, bestial form of solitude, it can just as readily be detected in conjunction with the latter divine form in its capacity of purging the soul of its material encrustations.

Expressly addressing themselves to the latter version of melancholy were the medieval and Renaissance mystics, who could thereby identify melancholy with what the mystical theorists termed the "dark night of the soul," the purgative reversion of the soul into a state of painful obscurity as it winged its way through the successive stages of its upward mystical journey.⁴¹ In this way the mystics sometimes appeared to countenance melancholy, which they construed to be a natural reaction to their strenuous meditative exercises still enmeshed to some degree in the material world, even as they methodically attempted to rid themselves of melancholy through spiritual exercises. The ambivalent attitude of mystical contemplatives to melancholy was closely bound up with their ambivalent attitude to the solitary life to which they dedicated their lives.

As we would expect, the mystics customarily preferred theological to medical terminology for the depiction of the diabolical challenges to their profession, with their characteristic framework consisting of the capital vices. As one example among many, the trecento mystical theorist Domenico Cavalca (d. 1342), the author of a "mirror of sins," noted that among those inordinately subject to the sin of sorrow (*tristizia*) are "many monks and nuns (*religiosi, e . . . religiose*) who are malcontent with their state."⁴² But the mystics also sometimes

⁴⁰ On the ancient and medieval history of this concept see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1936, 1960, 1965), chaps. 2 and 3, pp. 24 ff.

⁴¹ On this mystical concept see Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (Cleveland/New York: World Pub. Co., 1955, 1963), ch. 9, pp. 380 ff.

⁴² Domenico Cavalca, *Specchio de'Peccati*, ed. Francesco del Furia (Florence: Typografia all'insegna di Dante, 1828), cap. 5, p. 42.

incorporated medical language into their mystical speculations, as did St. Caterina of Genoa (1447–1510), who identified her excruciating solitary anguish with the infirmity diagnosed as melancholy by the physicians.

Vividly describing in her *Dialogo spirituale* the excruciating anguish induced by her mystical experiences, Caterina related of her alter ego protagonist Anima (= Soul) that she found herself “so stifled in a continuous state of melancholy (*soffocata in una continua malinconia*) that she did not know what to do with herself.”⁴³ While unable to cry outwardly, she complained, she nevertheless experienced “certain inward tears” and “hidden sighs,” the effect of which was a gradual but marked deterioration of her bodily functions. “Unable to eat, sleep, or speak,” Caterina’s Anima laments that “she lacked both bodily and spiritual appetite; could not say where she was, whether in Heaven or on earth; and was as if an insensate thing and out of her mind (*fuora di sé*).” Indeed, so alienated did she become “that she no longer resembled a human creature, but rather a frightful beast.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, while freely confessing her special proclivity to this affliction in connection with her solitary meditations, St. Caterina saw no more reason to use this admission as an excuse for forsaking her demanding way of life than her patristic and medieval mystical forerunners. The remedy for this distressful state St. Caterina found to be, not in an escape from solitude and return to civic responsibility as the humanists would advise her, but in the purgative power of divine love intrinsic to the mystical life.

“Many physicians were called to her,” St. Caterina further attested of Anima’s melancholy, “who looked at her, touched her, took her pulse, and observed every other sign for assessing the nature of her infirmity.” Upon meeting and sharing their diagnosis with one another, she continued, “all were in agreement that they could do nothing for her, for her said infirmity was supernatural (*la detta sua infirmità era soprannaturale*).” But if Caterina beheld in the conventional medical regimens an inadequate response to her melancholy, she did not simply resign herself to an acceptance of its torments. For a disease originating supernaturally, Caterina reasoned, called for a cure that

⁴³ St. Caterina of Genoa, *Il Dialogo Spirituale*, in *Opus Catharinianum*, 2 vols. (Genoa: Marietti, 1962), II, 398.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 400.

is also "supernatural, and therefore miraculous."⁴⁵ That which is denied to human inventiveness can still be furnished through a regimen transcending finite human capability—the regimen, Caterina determined, of divine love.

Only the cleansing power of love, Caterina contended, was capable of purging her soul, not only of the "continuous melancholy" with which she felt herself to be afflicted, but also of the infinite sorrow for her sins that was the ultimate cause of her melancholy. "Oh love," Caterina prayerfully entreated, "chase all melancholy from my heart, all harshness, all self-seeking, and all worldly pleasure!"⁴⁶ If melancholy represented for Caterina the weight of material dross from which her soul was trying to free itself, divine love represented for her the purifying agent which was able to cut through that dross and release her soul from its material encumbrances. Through the purifying power of love, Caterina exhorted, "the soul, which has been created by God, possesses a certain natural instinct to return to God in its pure and unadulterated state." Finding itself "to be imprisoned in a heavy body, corruptible and alien from this instinct," the soul so aspiring "waits with desire for the purification and death of its body so that it can exit from it, just as when the soul exits from Purgatory and enters Paradise." Utterly cleansed from the soul at the conclusion of the purgative process, we are made to assume, is that melancholy which is part and parcel of the body's corruptible nature. In this way, "God makes of the body of each of his creations a purgatorial vessel."⁴⁷

St. Caterina's supplication for divine love to "chase all melancholy from my heart" appears to assume that there is nothing of divine love already resident within melancholy, or, conversely, of melancholy within divine love. On the contrary, melancholy here appears to assume its conventional role as a diabolical obstacle to spiritual ascent, impeding rather than promoting the use of the body as, in Caterina's words, "a purgatorial vessel." In this outlook we have not yet arrived at the doctrine of melancholy love which the Florentine Ficino was contemporaneously transforming into a constructive agent of the purgative process. Rather, this approach to mystical melancholy

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

is more in agreement with that of the spiritual exercise tradition geared, not to nurturing melancholy in solitary contemplatives, but to systematically eradicating melancholy.

In the north of Europe an illustrious spokesman of this point of view was the French mystical theorist Jean Gerson (1363–1429), who held it to be especially relevant to the procedures of solitary meditation as a preliminary stage to contemplation.⁴⁸ In spelling out the cathartic exigencies of meditation, Gerson had compared melancholy, arising from an excessively arduous exercise of the mind, to the smoke which arises from a piece of wood when it is first enkindled and gradually disappears as the wood becomes transformed into pure charcoal.⁴⁹ A leading popularizer of Gerson's mystical theory in Italy was Pietro da Lucca (d. 1522), who addressed the problem of meditative melancholy in a chapter of a mystical handbook headed: "How in meditation a man should remove the spirit of the phantasms."⁵⁰ Wrote Da Lucca, with explicit reliance on Gerson: "He who will attend to this easy method of meditation will not succumb to the danger of frenzy. And he will flee many diabolical illusions, and will become neither fanciful nor melancholic nor mad, which afflictions are often wont to befall those who place their meditation fixedly on the corporeal image."⁵¹

Nevertheless, the mystical traditions within which St. Caterina of Genoa and Pietro da Lucca were working also reveal a more complex notion of melancholy whereby it can be said to contain the seed of its own remedy. That sorrow is not intrinsically evil, St. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) pointed out, is confirmed by the fact that Christ himself was conspicuously imbued with this passion. Thus the image of a sorrowful Christ successfully counters the Stoic

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Jean Gerson, *De meditatione cordis*, cap. 4, in J.E.G. de Montmorency, *Thomas à Kempis: His Age and his Book* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1906), append. I, p. 299: "Diximus autem et repetimus quod meditatio est fortis et vehemens applicatio vel attentio animi ad aliquod investigandum vel inveniendum fructuose. Addimus fructuose ne meditatio vergat aut in suspicionem at in curiositatem out in melancholicam stoliditatem." For a still viable biography of Gerson see James L. Connolly, *John Gerson: Reformer and Mystic* (Louvain: Libraire Universitaire/London: B. Herder, 1928).

⁴⁹ Gerson, *De monte contemplationis*, cap. 16, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Lud. Ellies du Pin, 5 vols. (Antwerp: Sumptibus Societatis, 1706), III, 554.

⁵⁰ Pietro da Lucca, *Regule de la vita spirituale & secreta theologia* (Venice: Appresso Bindoni & Pasini, 1538), fols. 28^v ff. First ed. pub. at Bologna in 1504.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 30^v.

adage that “no wise man grieves” (*nullus sapiens tristatur*).⁵² The methodical integration of this notion into the *via mystica* was earlier illustrated by the trecento mystical theorist Cavalca, who, while typically admonishing solitaries against a destructive and diabolical form of sorrow causing its victims “to fall into *accidia*, and into tedium of every good,”⁵³ also drew attention, in keeping with a fundamental Pauline distinction, to an beneficial form of sorrow standing apart from its deleterious form.

Declaring sorrow to be a mortal sin when it is “immoderate to the extent that a man is consumed by it and is provoked by its effects to slander God,” Cavalca also acknowledged that sorrow has the capacity to become transformed from a vice into a virtue when it is “ordered and tempered by reason.” Under the guidance of reason, St. Paul (II Cor. 7:10) instructed Cavalca, sorrow in the favorable mode “is sorrow and suffering for one’s own sins, which is called contrition and penitence.”⁵⁴ It was therefore Cavalca’s resolve, not to extirpate sorrow root-and-branch from the souls of mystics, but to channel sorrow to the sublime purposes to which the mystics dedicated themselves. What stands in the way of converting Cavalca’s notion of penitent sorrow into the full-blown doctrine of melancholy genius espoused by the Florentine Platonists is that it stops short of identifying St. Paul’s purgative “sorrow following God” (*tristitia secundum Deum*) with medically based melancholy.

Going an additional step of upholding a connection between the theological concept of sorrow and the medical one of melancholy was St. Antonino, who, as bishop of Florence, can be said to have played more directly than the foregoing mystical theorists into the spiritual climate surrounding the formation of Ficino’s Platonic circle. Referring the condition of melancholy, following conventional Galenic theory, to the core symptoms of fear and sorrow, St. Antonino further shared a basic premise with the contemporary civic humanists that melancholics “are indolent and heavy of heart, and love solitude, obscurity, and remoteness from all people.”⁵⁵ Setting Antonino apart from the civic humanists, however, was his view that the

⁵² St. Bernardino of Siena, *Tractatus de Christiana vita*, Serm. III, cap. 3, in *Opera quae extant omnia*, 3 vols. (Venice: Juntas, 1591), III, 193.

⁵³ Cavalca, *Specchio de’Peccati*, cap. 4, p. 37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, cap. 4, pp. 32, 34.

⁵⁵ St. Antonino, *Summa theologica in quatuor partes distribuita*, pars I, tit. 2, cap. 6, in *Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Verona: Apud Augustinum Carattonium, 1740), I, col. 92.

attraction of melancholics to solitude is not necessarily something to be shunned, since, as a longstanding monastic and mystical tradition had instructed him, melancholy can potentially work as effectively to the salvation as to the damnation of the soul in its solitary search of God.

Accepting a commonplace theme of the medical theorists that melancholy sometimes results “from excessive vigilance, fasting, zeal, anxiety, and profound thought (*ac cogitatione profunda*),”⁵⁶ all symptoms characteristic of religious solitaries, Antonino put the same idea in terms of the melancholic condition identified as *hereos* by the physicians, noting that “when a beloved good (*bonum amatum*) is absent to the lover, this absence causes sorrow.”⁵⁷ For Antonino the lover of God was no exception to this rule. But going a crucial step beyond the standard medical concept of love melancholy, Antonino added, in deference to the Pauline distinction between pernicious and penitent sorrow: “And when that [melancholy] sorrow proceeds from a desire for the heavenly fatherland and from the love of God, considering how sweet, how pleasant, and how useful it is to see and enjoy God, it is esteemed by the throngs of holy angels.”⁵⁸

It is true that, of itself, this medical insight on the part of St. Antonino was not necessarily of sufficient force to preserve the value of melancholy solitude before the recriminations of the civic humanists. For it would be a basic axiom of the Platonic revival engineered by Ficino in Antonino’s Florence, not that excessively profound speculation produces melancholy—a thesis already granted by the medical literature—but that melancholy, when infused with the supernatural power of God, is capable of producing profound speculation. But this critical difference between the two versions of religious melancholy aside, it can be safely stated that Antonino, by identifying sorrow of both kinds with melancholy, helped to produce a more propitious climate of thought at Florence within which a doctrine of melancholy genius could take seed and prosper. What still stood in the way of the full-fledged genial theory subsequently formulated by Ficino, however, was Antonino’s still conventional theological framework for assessing melancholy basically untouched by the kinds of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pars I, tit. 6, cap. 7, col. 450.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pars I, tit. 9, cap. 2, in *Opera omnia*, II, col. 938.

philosophical concerns prompting the Florentine Platonic revival. Nevertheless, the monastic-mystical tradition informing Antonino, while itself proving inadequate to the task of producing a full-blown theory of melancholy genius, can still be credited, in association with the medical and humanist traditions, with helping to prepare the ground in which that theory could take root and grow.

* * *

A specialized branch of mysticism that can also be credited with helping prepare the ground for Ficino's genial theory was alchemy, an occult discipline finding an influential summary in the Emerald Table—the *tabula smaragdina*—ascribed by tradition to the ancient magus Hermes Trismegistus. “Melancholy, which oscillates between morbid sorrow, depression, and dreaming,” a student of this subject has recently surmised, “is a state typically alchemical.”⁵⁹ Mystically interpreted within a Christian context, the state of putrefactive “blackness” (*nigredo*) initiating the transmutative process, commonly held by the alchemists to be ruled over by planetary Saturn and identified with the melancholic stage of their inward sublimative process, corresponds to the temporary death of the body preliminary to its resurrection in the afterlife.⁶⁰

An instructive pre-Ficinian example of this alchemical interpretation of melancholy is provided by the trecento Hermeticist of Ferrara, Pietro Antonio Boni (fl. 1330). Maintaining the requirement of an inward spiritual transmutation on the part of the alchemist to correspond to the outward transmutation being attempted in the laboratory, Boni declared that in the act of sublimation “is germinated

⁵⁹ J. Van Lennep, *Art et Alchimie* (Paris/Brussels: Editions Meddens, 1966), p. 201. According to an ancient legend the thirteen alchemical precepts of the Emerald Table were found buried with Trismegistus in his Egyptian Tomb. For a list of these precepts, purportedly trans. from Phoenician to Latin, see Julius Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1926), p. 2, and for an English translation, John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1936; 2nd ed., 1939, repr. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), p. 54. For a summary introduction to this subject within the larger context of the arcane traditions see Lawrence E. Sullivan, ed. *Hidden Truths: Magic, Alchemy, and the Occult* (New York: Macmillan/London: Collier Macmillan, 1987, 1989), pp. 269 ff.

⁶⁰ Thus, Van Lennep (see note above), p. 203: “En Saturne se fond donc le putréfaction et la *nigredo* (meule et plomb), mais aussi l'espoir d'une résurrection inhérent à toute mort.”

a pure-white soul which, with the spirit as its intermediary, flies together with the spirit to Heaven.” For this reason, maintained Boni, at bottom alchemy “is above nature, that is to say, it is divine” (*alchimia est supra naturam, et est divina*).⁶¹ It logically followed for a mystical alchemist like Boni that, so far as his favored Hermetic discipline could be judged to be divinely inspired, so could each particular stage of alchemical transformation, including, as it were, the initiatory putrefactive stage of *nigredo*, commonly associated by the alchemists with melancholy.

Much as Boni anticipated Ficino in the way he spiritualized a form of magic, so did he anticipate Ficino in assigning vaticinal powers to the adepts of his arcane art, corresponding to Plato’s *furor propheticus*, one of the four basic species of the *furor divinus*. Thus, observed Boni, the alchemists of old “were highly esteemed not only as philosophers above all others, but also as prophets of the future.” In the latter role, Boni noted, “they prophesied not only in general (*non solum generaliter*), but also in particular (*specialiater*), having foreseen that there must arrive the final day of judgment and annihilation of the world, followed by the resurrection of the dead.”⁶²

Boni’s attitude, as reflected in this declaration, was largely conditioned by the apocalyptic climate of his time over which prevailed widescale famine, war, and plague. That this climate had not altogether dissipated by Ficino’s day was attested by the advent of the apocalyptically minded prophet Giovanni Savonarola, a grandson of the earlier-cited physician Michele, into the very lap of Ficino’s Florence. In the context of quattrocento events, as we will subsequently observe in its place, the inspired prophet Savonarola and his disciples would take sharp issue with Ficino’s thesis that prophetic enlightenment can find any constructive use in a humor far more notable for assisting diabolical perversities than in promoting ways to overcome those perversities. But more than a century earlier the alchemist Boni, under even greater apocalyptic pressure than Savonarola, arrived at a position more anticipatory of Ficino than of Savonarola by locating in the magical alchemist, eminently notable for his melancholy, a rare ability to peer with lucid clairvoyance into the future.

⁶¹ Pietro Antonio Boni (= Petrus Bonus), *Pretiosa margarita: novella de thesauro, ac pretiosissimo philosophorum lapide* (Venice: n.p., 1557), fol. 38^v. Tract also found in *Theatrum Chemicum*, 6 vols. (Strassburg: Lazari Zetzneri, 1613–1661), V, 507–718.

⁶² *Ibid.*, fol. 39^r.

According to Carl Jung, who has found much in the history of alchemy to throw light on the nature of the human psyche, Pietro Boni was especially notable for putting "the suffering back into the investigator by stressing his mental torments."⁶³ In this respect, too, Boni anticipated a primary theme of Ficino, who was to find the anguish of melancholy at the heart of the solitary meditative experience. After Ficino, as we will also see, were to come others with a comparably Hermetic turn of mind who would find in melancholy more to praise than to condemn as an inevitable participant in their occult operations. Assisting the Hermeticists in preparing this shift of attitude toward melancholy, we will also have occasion to point out, was the art of astrology. For it was a premise of traditional astrology, as earlier indicated by Dante's recognition of a "gift" of extraordinary contemplative genius attached to the planet Saturn, that good as well as evil can arise out of our celestially conditioned dispositions.

If the medical perspective represented by the physicians constitutes one hub round which a debate about the possible benefits of melancholy could revolve, and if the theological perspective of the demonologists and mystics constitutes a second hub, the humanist perspective constitutes still a third hub. Distinguishing them from the physicians, the humanists were generally more attuned to moral than physical injury induced by melancholy, and, distinguishing them from the theologians, they were more attuned to the socially adverse effects of melancholy than to its reputed ability to be manipulated by evil spirits. Nevertheless, to be brought out in the concluding section of this chapter, humanism, like its medical and theological counterparts, proved itself to be capable of readying the ground for a reevaluation of melancholy by the Florentine Platonists—this, in three ways. The first way was through their association of both melancholy and the solitary way of life with which it was commonly linked by the humanist scholars to the exigencies of their own studious activities; the second way, through celebration by the humanists of ancient heroes, poets, philosophers and the like depicted in the ancient literature as characteristic sufferers of melancholy; and the third, through conveyance by the humanists of the ancient philosophical doctrine attributed

⁶³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, Bollingen Series XX, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), p. 330.

to Aristotle transforming melancholic alienation from a debilitating infirmity into a defining mark of the genial mind.

C. *The Humanist Perspective*

Of the noteworthy changes recognized by historians of modern Europe as marking the transition from the medieval to the modern world, one of the most distinctive is the economic shift from a predominantly land-based agricultural economy centered in the north of Europe to a predominantly town-based commercial economy initially centered in the Mediterranean south. In Italy, a pivot of this transition, the change from a country to town orientation was accompanied by an extensive intellectual rationale to justify it, the basic guidelines of which were laid down by ancient Greek and Roman political theorists. The general strategy of this rationale, for which Renaissance Florence served as a principal propagator, was to downplay the value of contemplative solitude that had served as a mainstay of the medieval mentality and to sing the praises of its opposite, civic engagement in the furtherance of an active communal life. While it is true that Renaissance humanism in its strictest sense—as a restoration of ancient paradigms of human behavior through the agency of the languages in which they were originally expressed—could be appropriated by exponents of the solitary *vita contemplativa* as readily as by the exponents of the civic-minded *vita activa*, in the town life of Italy the title *umanista*, at least after Petrarca, more often than not was turned against those who would forsake a healthy civic engagement for the melancholy loneliness of encloistered solitude.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Concerning this development see esp. Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), with the essential issue summarized at p. 7. But for criticisms of Baron's thesis see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970; repr., Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1995), I, 282–83, and, more extensively, Albert Rabil, Jr., "The Significance of 'Civic Humanism' in the Interpretation of the Italian Renaissance," in Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism*, I, 141–74. For the civic implications of humanism see Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 37 ff., and *La Cultura Filosofica del Rinascimento Italiano: Ricerche e Documenti* (Florence: Sansoni, 1992), pp. 3 ff. Nevertheless, especially as illustrated by the

“The city-state (*polis*),” proclaimed Aristotle (*Politics*, I,1.9) in anticipation of what was to become a widely shared sentiment of the quattrocento humanists, “is a natural growth, and . . . man is by nature a political animal (*ho anthropos physei politikon zoon*).” The violation of this basic definition of the human being was further summed up by Aristotle in the comparably celebrated maxim, found in close proximity to the foregoing one, that “man alone is either a beast or a god.” Thanks to a scholar proficient in the Greek language like Leonardo Bruni (1377–1444), who rendered Aristotle’s *Politics* into Latin along with the comparably man-centered *Nichomachean Ethics*, a hostile attitude to solitude became a mainstay of the quattrocento civic humanists, the general inclination of whom, as we might expect, was to view the *vita solitaria* as far more likely to reduce a man to bestiality than to exalt him to divinity.

At the heart of this question lay the psychological concept of “alienation” (*alienatio*), with two contradictory renderings of its meaning coming into collision. Over and against the famous adage of the Christian father Tertullian (*Apol.*, 38), representative of the prevailing solitude-extolling medieval view that “there is nothing more alien to the human being than the public thing” (*nec ulla magis res aliena, quam publica*), was countered the maxim of the civic-loving Roman Terence (*Hauton.*, 77), more compatible with the current town-based realities of Italy, that “I am a man, and I believe nothing human to be alien from me” (*Homo sum: humani nihili a me alienum puto*). And from a civic point of view, corroborated by an Aristotelian “political” rendering of what it means to be human, a preference for the Terrentian over the Tertullian dictum on alienation sometimes also entailed a caveat against the particular form of alienation, termed melancholy by the physicians, commonly held to be a distinguishing feature of solitary isolation.

transalpine humanists, the principles of humanism were also espoused by some advocates of the encloistered life, of which the subject of my study *The Abbot Trithemius (1462–1516): The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981) can be invoked as a representative example. Cf. Klaus Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516)* (Würzburg: Kommissionsverlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1971; 2nd ed., 1991). Concerning the debate over the relative superiority of the active and contemplative lives during the Italian Renaissance see Eugene Rice, Jr., *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 30 ff., and Brian Vickers, ed. *Arbeit, Musse, Meditation: Betrachtungen zur Vita Activa und Vita Contemplativa* (Zürich: Verlag der Fachvereine, 1985), pp. 133 ff.

To be sure, religious recluses were also often observed to warn against the bane of melancholy, which they perceived to be a fit instrument of demons intent on subverting their solitary spiritual devotions. Whereas, however, the monastic proponents of religious detachment sought to solve the problem of melancholy within the context of their beloved solitary ideal, the civic-minded humanists, with the Greek Aristotle of the *Politics* and *Ethics* as much their guide as the Roman Cicero, declared the penchant of solitaries for melancholy to be an essential rather than accidental vice of their profession. Moreover, the civic humanists, in their own minds as piously Christian as their solitude-loving opponents, could find authoritative support for their position not only in the ancient gentile writers, but also in sacred scripture, most notably in the book of Genesis (2:18) where Adam is counseled by God, in explanation of why he is about to be provided with a female helpmate, that "it is not good for a man to be alone!"

The basic problem with this way of thinking, if rigorously pursued to its logical conclusion, is that it fails to account for the phenomenon known as genius. For genius, as even the civic humanists were occasionally compelled to grant, requires at least a modicum of solitude for the fulfillment of its arduous mental endeavors. The fitting paradigm for such genius is the ancient hero who, as conveyed to the Renaissance by the literature of the ancient writers, is more notable for separating himself from the civic body than in assimilating himself to it. In corresponding fashion human genius could be viewed by the Renaissance humanists, on the same model as the prototypal hero, as requiring at least occasional bouts of melancholy separation from the crowd for the consummation of its strenuous labors. If one pole of the humanist spectrum, then, can be said to consist of a civic motif, another can be said to consist of a genial-heroic motif, the latter of which presumes the necessity of some measure of melancholy seclusion to bring it to full flower. Here is a quandary over the proper ends of our human *vocatio* which, having plagued many ancient thinkers, again lay at the nexus of literary and philosophical thought during the Italian quattrocento when there predominated a widespread desire to recapitulate and revise many of the old theories.

Civic humanism as here treated, one of the more prominent expressions of the Italian Renaissance as it has come into the purview of modern scholarship, represents a self-conscious reaction to the ear-

lier medieval tendency to subject active political life to solitary contemplative life. More particularly, the ideal which it countered was a product of medieval monastic culture.⁶⁵ It goes without saying, however, that the potential benefits of solitude were not exclusively reserved for monastic clerics. It applied as readily, notwithstanding accompanying admonitions concerning the dangers of excessive time spent alone, to the secular humanist scholars themselves. As it will now be our object to illustrate, the civic-solitary tension did not divide only lay humanists from religious clerics. It also divided lay humanists from one another, some of whom were more appreciative than others of the advantages to their scholarly needs, its well-known association with melancholy notwithstanding, of a solitary way of life.

* * *

In one respect St. Thomas Aquinas can be said to have anticipated the Renaissance civic humanist position by proclaiming in his *Summa theologica*, echoing Aristotle, that "man is by nature a social animal" (*homo est naturaliter animal sociale*).⁶⁶ In another respect, however, following his further tenet that "grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it" (*gratia non tollit sed perfecit naturam*), St. Thomas placed his accent, as the civic humanists did not, on the strict subjection of the temporal and sensible communal status of the human being to an atemporal and supersensible status geared to the salvation of the individual soul.⁶⁷ It was under the force of the identical proposition that Dante located in the highest "saturnine" reaches of Heaven the solitude-loving St. Benedict and St. Damian, and further made a

⁶⁵ For George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400-50* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), the early quattrocento humanist movement centered at Florence assumed an approach to knowledge and human behavior which sharply departed from the traditional medieval approach. On the residual conflict between these ideals see Rice, *Idea of Wisdom*, ch. 2: "Active and Contemplative Ideals of Wisdom in Italian Humanism," pp. 30 ff. That the civic shift to republican activism should not be confused with one to "paganism," a primary Burckhardian motif, is thoroughly established by Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, I, 51 ff. A basic theme of Trinkaus's study consists of the quattrocento humanist endeavor to reconcile civic principles of behavior with devotion to God and to the traditional Catholic dogmas.

⁶⁶ *Summa theologica*, II, IIae, qu. 129, art. 6, ad 1. See also St. Thomas, *Commentary on Nicomachean Ethics*, lib. I, cited in Randall, *The Making of the Modern Mind* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1926, 1949, 1976), p. 59.

⁶⁷ *Summa theologica*, I, qu. 1, art 8, ad 2.

place in his paradisiacal vision for another contemplative notable for his love of solitude, the twelfth-century contemplative Richard of St. Victor (*Paradisio*, X, 131–32), whom he lauded as “more than a man” (*più che uomo*). Nevertheless, signaling the shift from medieval to Renaissance values, the uneasy coexistence envisaged by St. Thomas and Dante between, on one hand, the civic obligations of the human being and, on the other hand, his solitary aspiration to achieve proximity to God proved to be a tenuous one, with the underlying lines of stress dividing them eventually evolving into outright fractures.

The obstacles to be overcome by the civic humanists in their campaign to overturn the customary medieval bias in favor of solitude, as it turned out, did not consist only of “reactionary” regular clerics. Also standing in their way were certain “progressive” members of their own literary profession, among whom their own luminous paragon Francesco Petrarca (= Petrarch, 1304–1375), who in several of his writings profusely praised the virtues of the solitary life, towers above all the rest. For Petrarca had understandably recognized that, were he to find the time and leisure to fulfill his ambitious literary and cultural program, he needed to adopt a life style not essentially distinguishable from the solitary one of monastic scholars.⁶⁸

At the same time, in the very midst of addressing his accolades to “sweet solitude” in the manner of the medieval monks, Petrarca also complained of being vexed in his solitary studies by intense psychic disturbances reminiscent of those described by his encloistered forerunners. Characterizing his painful malaise as “a certain pernicious pest of the mind which the moderns call *accidia*, and the ancients,

⁶⁸ See esp. Petrarca's *De vita solitaria*, in *Prose*, ed. G. Martelloti, P.G. Ricci, E. Carrara, and E. Bianchi, Vol. II of *La Letteratura Italiana: Storia e Testi* (Milan/Naples: Riccardo Riccardi, 1955), pp. 285–591, and *De Otio Religioso*, ed. Giuseppe Rotondi (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1958), with excerpt from latter work in Martelloti et al., ed. *Prose*, pp. 593–603. On the tension between the active and solitary ways of life in Petrarca see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 18 ff.; Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers*, pp. 14 ff.; Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, II, 654–62; and, most recently, Maristella Lorch, “Petrarch, Cicero, and the Classical Pagan Tradition,” and Albert Rabil, Jr., “Petrarch, Augustine, and the Classical Christian Tradition,” in Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism*, I, 71–94, 95–114. As noted by Kristeller in these same vols., III, 296: “Moreover, the ideal of the theoretical or contemplative life became dissociated during the Renaissance from the specific ideal of monasticism, and rather identified with the private existence of the scholar, writer, and scientist, no doubt under the influence of ancient philosophy; and this secularization of the contemplative life seems to me no less characteristic of the Renaissance (and modern times) than the simultaneous emphasis on the claims of the active life.”

aegritudo," Petrarca went on to identify his scourge with an affliction listed in the traditional capital vice scheme, itself forged within a monastic setting, as *acedia*.⁶⁹ The condition described by Petrarca, however, a mixture of languor and sorrow, is a far cry from the state of simple laziness or indolence connoted by the English word sloth (that is, slow-th) generally assigned to this vice, reaching as it does to a deeper level of human psyche.

Petrarca's depiction of his dolorous affliction reflects a critical transformation that had taken place in the interpretation of vicious *acedia* since the days when the desert fathers had first encountered it in their caves and cloisters. Early on its close proximity to another capital vice, *tristitia* (grief or sorrow) prompted some theorists to coalesce the two vices as one, a more psychologically profound view of the condition inherited and philosophically formalized by St. Thomas.⁷⁰ In its original monastic form, before becoming fused with *tristitia*, *acedia* better corresponded to what the physicians termed the phlegmatic than the melancholic condition, the humoral analogue of vicious indolence. Petrarca's secularized restatement of the old monastic vice as *accidia*, by absorbing aspects of *tristitia* in keeping with the Thomistic amalgamation of the two states, reflects the greater profundity and complexity with which it had come to be endowed with

⁶⁹ Petrarca, *De secreto conflictu curarum mearum*, lib. II, in Martellotti et al., *Prose*, pp. 106–107. On the evolution of the capital vice scheme see Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State College Press, 1952). On *acedia* in particular and its variants (from the Greek word *akedia* = non-caring), see Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth. Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1967), with Petrarca's revision of this concept treated, pp. 155 ff. Cf. Wenzel, "Petrarch's *Accidia*," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), 36–48, and Ernest Wilkins, "On Petrarch's *Accidia* and his Adamantine Chains," *Speculum*, 37 (1962), 589–94.

⁷⁰ On this development see Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, pp. 23–4, 47–48. Originally defined by the desert monk Johannes Cassianus (d. ca. 435), in *De coenobiorum institutis libri XII*, x, 1 (Migne, *PL*, 49: 359–63), as *taedium sive anxietas cordis* (tedium or solicitude of heart) *acedia* was merged by St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), in *Moralium in Job libri XXXV*, xlv, 88–9 (Migne, *PL*, 76:621), with a superficially similar vice, *tristitia* (sorrow). On Cassian's systematization of the vice-scheme, adopted from Evagrius in the east, see Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, pp. 18 ff., and on its transformation by St. Gregory, pp. 233 ff. This more profound implication of the vice was indicated by St. Thomas' redefinition of *acedia*, *Summa theologica*, II, II, q. 35, a. 3, as *tristitia de bono spirituali* (sorrow concerning a spiritual good). On St. Thomas' adoption of the Gregorian vice list see Bloomfield, *Seven Deadly Sins*, pp. 87–88, and Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, pp. 44–46.

the passage of time, paralleling, it would seem, a comparable profundity and complexity residing in melancholy as spelled out by the medical literature.

Those discerning an element of virtue in Petrarca's "vice," however, did not necessarily need to go to the medical literature to bolster their position. Even more persuasively, they could go to sacred scripture to make the same point. After all, as earlier pointed out, even while locating sorrow among the capital vices the theologians were compelled to recognize, on the authority of no less than St. Paul, that the passion of sorrow did not exist exclusively in a secular form (*tristitia seculi*) in service to the Devil. It also existed in a supersecular, penitent form "following God" (*tristitia secundum Deum*). Among those taking departure from the critical Pauline distinction between two forms of sorrow was St. Thomas, who proclaimed in praise of the favorable form that "elevation of the soul proceeds from sadness which is according to God (*erectio animi provenit ex tristitia quae est secundum Deum*), because of the adjoined hope of the remission of sin."⁷¹ If the Renaissance heirs to St. Thomas' insight could persuasively argue that such sorrowful *erectio animi* was optimally achievable in a state of solitary detachment from the civic crowd, it did not stretch their argument much further to cast the religious language of St. Paul into the medical language of Galen. Renaissance apologists of solitude in the footsteps of Petrarca, as their medieval predecessors, could claim that St. Paul's *tristitia secundum Deum* can also be expressed in humoral terms as *melancholia secundum Deum*.

In keeping with this dual meaning of *tristitia-accidia*, Petrarca's malaise appears to be the result more of a mind reaching too high than of sinking too low, triggering a psychological response which he likened to despair. Moreover, it visited Petrarca above all when he was busy with his solitary scholarly pursuits, hardly an occupation to feel guilty about so long as they were directed to worthy objects. While most definitely exhibiting symptoms in common with those of a dreaded medieval vice, Petrarca's solitude-inducing *accidia*, which he also dubbed, in the language of the *dolce stil nuovo*, his "sweet pain" (*dolce pianto*), exhibited other symptoms which appeared to be more suggestive of a virtuous than of a vicious disposition.

⁷¹ *Summa theologica*, I, IIae, qu. 37, art. 2, ad 1. For the scriptural source of this distinction see above, p. 43.

The civic humanists in literary debt to Petrarca, on the other hand, whose revival of Cicero was not so attenuated by a residual medieval Augustinianism as that of their admired forerunner, were generally less amenable to the solitary ideal which he had made a cornerstone of his classical program. A key index to the shift of the civic humanists away from Petrarca's praise of solitude can be discerned in a decisive shift in their envisagement of the goddess Fortuna. For whereas Petrarca, as extensively spelled out in his *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, conceived of the buffetings of fortune as most effectively countered by an individual form of willful fortitude patterned after that counseled by the ancient Stoics, the civic humanists rather conceived of those same buffetings as most effectively countered by a communal joining of wills in shared dedication to the same goal. For these, who found their ideological backing more in the republican beginnings of ancient Rome than in its later imperial stages conditioning the individualism of Petrarca's hero Augustine, the town better than the cloister was empowered to overcome the goddess Fortuna's blows.⁷²

Illustrating the republican sentiment behind the increasing aversion to solitude by the early Renaissance humanists was the Lombard scholar Bartolomeo Sacchi, better known as Platina (1421–1481), whose service to monarchical autocrats like the Gonzaga of Mantua and the Roman papacy did not deter him, with a nostalgic glance back to Ciceronian Rome apparently reinforced by many years spent there, from exhorting a return to its republican values. In this spirit Platina pronounced a distinct preference for civic activity as practiced by the ancient Romans over the kind of solitary speculation "pertaining to the knowledge of occult and admirable matters" for which the ancient Greeks and Egyptians were renowned. Despite the rationalizations of solitary thinkers, whereby, as they maintained, by removal from society they might better "contemplate the nature of things and of gods," Platina held more bad than good to issue from

⁷² A still useful summary of this theme is found in Howard Rollin Patch, "The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Philosophy and Literature," in *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, III (July, 1922), 179–233, with its chief Renaissance exemplars treated, pp. 204 ff. Cf. Alfred Dorn, "Fortuna im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, 1922–1923/I. Teil (Leipzig/Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1924), 71–144.

solitary leisure.⁷³ In particular he saw as arising “from too much idleness” (*ex nimio ocio*), a prominent characteristic of the solitary life, a number of debilitating diseases that included melancholy.⁷⁴

With the exception of the publicly engaged humanist Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), who, in seeming contradiction to his role as Florentine chancellor, seconded his master Petrarca’s praise of solitary scholarly leisure,⁷⁵ the contention that solitary retirement furnishes a more propitious setting for the stimulation of profound thought and elevated spiritual consciousness than busy town life did not generally impress Petrarca’s more civic-minded followers. A prominent case in point was Salutati’s successor as Florence’s chancellor, Leonardo Bruni, who, with the illustrious example of Dante to guide him, expressly set out in his biography of his admired Florentine predecessor “to correct the erroneous opinion of many ignorant people that only those can be numbered among the scholars who hide themselves in solitude and leisure.” By marrying and assuming civic duties, Bruni observed, Dante confirmed by both his life and writings that “there can be nothing perfect when such a community is lacking.”⁷⁶ For Bruni, whose writings are replete with allusions to a close-knit association between “virtue, nobility, and genius” and their joint dependency on the exercise of civic (read: republican) freedom,

⁷³ Bartolomeo Platina (= Sacchi), *De optimo cive liber*, pref., in *De falso & vero bono dialogi*. . . . (Paris: Johan Petit, 1530), fol. lxxviii^r v. On Platina see Garin, *Storia*, I, 326–29. Platina’s devotion of much of his career to autocratic princes, of which his dedication of an affiliated tract, titled *De principe viro*, to an heir of the current Gonzagan duke of Mantua, should give us pause in identifying the civic ideal too stringently, as suggested by Baron, with the Florentine republican experiment. Explaining away this apparent contradiction for Baron, *Crisis*, p. 437, are alleged “personal bonds” linking Platina to the Florentine civic humanists. For Quentin Skinner, on the other hand, as pointed out in an essay included in Schmitt et. al., ed. *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 424, Platina’s political writings illustrate the proliferation during their day of a number of “mirror-for-prince manuals,” as pertinent to monarchical autocracies like that of the Visconti of Milan and the Gonzaga of Mantua as to republics like those of Florence, Venice, and Siena.

⁷⁴ Platina, *De falso & vero bono*, lib. 2, fol. xix^r. Platina’s converseance with humoral theory is more fully demonstrated in his treatise *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (Cologne: Eucharij Cervicorni, 1537), lib. I, cap. 1, pp. 10–11.

⁷⁵ For this feature of Salutati’s outlook see esp. his *De seculo et religione*, ed. B.L. Ullman (Florence: S. Olschki, 1957), and its treatment by Trinkaus in *Image*, II, 662–74.

⁷⁶ Leonardo Bruni, *Vita di Dante*, cited in Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 39. Cf. Baron, *Crisis*, p. 531n.

Dante's genial powers were inseparable from the civic context within which he was raised and nurtured.⁷⁷ As for the psychic consequences likely to result from a failure to observe Bruni's civic version of Dante, Bruni's Florentine contemporary Lapo da Castiglionchio (d. 1438) put them in a nutshell when he exclaimed that "there is no pleasure in life which you may enjoy alone, for solitude is extremely burdensome and deprives one of all savor of life."⁷⁸

Nevertheless, with Petrarca as their shared guide, even the civic humanists were not altogether unmindful of a more positive side to solitude, melancholy or no, potentially conducive to the advancement of their cultural ideals. This was especially the case when a given humanist demonstrated an ability to go beyond the Latin limitations of Petrarca and even the Greek ones of Bruni, as did the Florentine Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459), who, motivated by biblical studies, added Hebrew to Latin and Greek in his linguistic arsenal. Thus, in the very midst of extolling the virtues of civic engagement in a panegyric on human dignity often cited by Renaissance scholars as a forerunner of Pico della Mirandola's more famous one, Manetti acknowledged, with Moses a prime illustration, that still higher virtues might be cultivated in solitary retreat from a sense-based society. Wrote Manetti: "Moses, erudite in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and the first and greatest of the prophets who entrusted their prophecies to letters, inasmuch as he desired to separate himself from sensibles, did not hesitate to wander into the vast solitude of Ethiopia where, having left behind and dispensed with all secular business, he turned his mind and soul to the meditation of very high and divine things."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Mark Jurdjevic, "Civic Humanism and the Rise of the Medici," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (1999), 1002: "In the *Panegyric*, *History of Florence*, and *Oration for the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi*, Bruni proposes . . . that 'virtue, nobility, and genius' can only flourish among politically free people. The logic of this equation works both ways. One could infer that where virtue, nobility, and genius exist, political freedom must therefore also prevail."

⁷⁸ Lapo da Castiglionchio, *Dialogus de curiae commodis*, in *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin, Vol. 13 of *La Letteratura Italiana: Storia e Testi* (Milan/Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1952), pp. 210–11.

⁷⁹ Giannozzo Manetti, *De dignitate & excellentia hominis libri IIII* (Basel: Jo. Alexandri Brassicani, 1532), lib. II, p. 73. On Manetti's civic predilections see Baron, *Crisis*, pp. 395–96; Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 59–60, and *Storia*, I, 331–34; and Trinkaus, *Image*, I, 230–58. Concerning Manetti's Hebrew studies see Trinkaus, II, 578–601, pointing up, in conjunction, Bruni's anti-Hebraic views.

In this way Manetti, notable for locating dynamic activity and creativity at the heart of human dignity through his notion of *homo faber*—"man the creator," concurrently felt obliged to allow a legitimate place for solitary retirement from society where a kind of rare prophet-scholar like Moses might fulfill his genius free of worldly distraction. But whereas Manetti's plea for at least a modicum of solitude in association with his civic duties ignored the issue of melancholy that was a familiar visitor of the solitary life, this was not the case for a contemporary embodiment of his *homo faber* ideal, the scholar-architect Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472). For Alberti, a Genoan-born member of an exiled Florentine family, discovered through excruciating personal experience what the Averroist physician Alessandro Achillini (1463–1512), Pietro Pomponazzi's predecessor in his chair at Padua, declaimed from his university lectern. "We sometimes observe one to become melancholic," Achillini cautioned his students, "by reason of the study of letters."⁸⁰ What Alberti could not quite decide, as will now be the focus of our attention, was whether the melancholy commonly visiting scholars like himself was mostly a boon or a bane to his intense solitary cerebrations.

* * *

Of Alberti's writings highlighting his civic credentials, his *Della Famiglia*, conceived on the premise that civic virtue is founded on a sound family life, stands out as a foremost representative. "Men," he proclaimed therein, "are sociable by nature, and congregate eagerly and willingly with one another. They live cheerfully among their fellow men, and flee and detest solitude, which makes them sorrowful."⁸¹ Further along Alberti maintained in the same spirit that "what is pleasing to man is not idleness and cessation, but performance and activity (*ma operazione e azione*)," the reason being that "man is born, not to languish in the sadness of solitude, but to busy himself in

⁸⁰ Alessandro Achillini, *Quaestio de subjectio physionomiae et chiromantiae*, in *Opera omnia* (Venice: Apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1568), p. 264. For Achillini's application of this caveat to the larger question of the origin of genius see below, p. 155.

⁸¹ Leon Battista, Alberti *I Libri della Famiglia*, lib. 1, in *Opere volgari*, ed. Cecil Grayson, 2 vols. (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1960), I, 45. A trans. of this tract, not here used, has been provided by Renée Neu Watkins as *The Family in Renaissance Florence [Della Famiglia]* (Columbia, S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1969). On Alberti see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 61–5, and Joan Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969).

great and extensive matters.”⁸² At the same time, however, in his role as a devotee of the scholarly life, Alberti grudgingly acknowledged in other of his writings that the pursuit of letters cannot be properly accomplished without at least some encounter with solitude and its attendant melancholy sorrow.

In his dialogue *Della tranquillità dell'animo* Alberti had one of his spokesmen announce, in a manner redolent of the ancient Stoics on whose moral philosophy the title was based, his desire to “flee from that insanity of many who, as a result of their melancholy thoughts (*per loro concette malinconie*), suffer insomnia, neglect eating, become lost to themselves, flee from the society of others so that they neither see, nor are seen by, other men, and in their solitude and shadows behave as though stupefied and weak-minded.”⁸³ In another dialogue, however, his *Delle comodità et delle incomodità delle lettere*, Alberti indicated that a foremost cause of such *concette malinconie* lay in the exigencies of the very literary profession producing counsel like this. For among the wretched souls pre-eminently disposed to solitary “melancholy and suffering” (*la maninconia & il dolore*), Alberti acknowledged, are certain individuals of his own profession who, “deprived of the very pleasant and sweet conversation of their fellow citizens, take delight in solitude, flee from all types of reasoning save that which pertains to their discipline, and are acquainted in a certain manner with an ancient form of melancholy (*di una antica maninconia*).”⁸⁴

“This extremely bitter fatigue of studies, and exceedingly burdensome meditation (*pensiero*) of the mind,” Alberti complained in his *Delle comodità*, “always contributes to us something more of self-torment than of rejoicing.” If, on one hand, scholars manage to elicit a certain pleasure from their arduous studies, Alberti pessimistically mused, on the other hand they generally find a way to stifle that pleasure “by their reflections and very great labors.” On this account, Alberti

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 134.

⁸³ Alberti, *Della tranquillità dell'animo libri tre*, lib. III, in *Opere volgari*, 5 vols., ed. Anicio Bonucci (Florence: Tipografia Galileiana, 1844), I, 109.

⁸⁴ Alberti, *Delle comodità et delle incomodità delle lettere*, in *Opuscoli morali*, ed., trans. M. Cosimo Bartoli (Venice: Appresso Francesco Franceschi Sanese, 1568), pp. 147, 150. Concerning Alberti's view of the superrational demands of literary imagining, considered as an alternative form of “philosophizing” (through allegory and metaphor rather than through syllogizing), see Ernesto Grassi and Maristella Lorch, *Folly and Insanity in Renaissance Literature* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1986), pp. 65 ff.

admonished, one who adopts a life of letters is prone to suffer an excruciating “anxiety of studies” (*ansietà degli studii*), the result being that “he cannot sleep, eat, or rest, takes no pleasure or repose in anything, and, endeavoring to understand all things, constantly remains in a state of bitter thought.” As for those things he has already learned, he is able to retain them only with great effort, with great skill, “and with great anxiety and reflection.”⁸⁵

What strikes the reader from this diagnosis of the “scholar’s disease” by Alberti is that its symptoms belong to one who, being discontented with the pedestrian concerns of everyday life, seeks but fails to find solace in contemplative detachment from those concerns. Moreover, further passages from his treatise inform us, one so inclined to the scholarly life, being dissatisfied with the finite nature of the worldly concerns from which he is attempting to escape, strives to surmount them through an inner drive to the infinite. At bottom, as Alberti further spelled out his diagnosis, the cause of the painful tribulations arising out of intense intellectual inquiry is that “the studious man is never able to find a method of imposing a limit on his desire for learning. Nor is it ever permitted to him to rest his mind until that time when he has wiped away his ignorance of all the most hidden things.” As a result, Alberti warned, a man of letters “has very little or no quiet in either his mind or body, always remains melancholy and solitary (*sta sempre malinconico & solitario*), and displays bitter weariness, extreme vigilance, curious thoughts, very lofty occupations, and ardent cares.” Such a man, accordingly, “is never able to find pleasure or delight, and throughout his life fails to savor so much as a moment of rest from his labors and vexations.”⁸⁶ Much as the contemporary mystics prescribed an “infinite cure” for what they diagnosed as an “infinite disease,” so does the same prescription logically apply to the scholarly melancholy characterized by Alberti as “infinite anxiety, infinite strivings, infinite discomfort, infinite harmful injuries, infinite travails, and infinite calamities.”⁸⁷

Of the “infinite” disturbances said by Alberti to unsettle scholars, one in particular received special mention from his pen. Reference is to what he termed “the pleasures of love” (*i piaceri amorosi*); “from

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

these,” he entreated his readers, “I desire that literary men be most alien.”⁸⁸ The motive behind this admonition is more fully spelled out in a passage of Alberti’s dialogue *Della famiglia*, where a participant to the discussion at hand exhorts: “Let us flee from this amorous frenzy (*furia amatoria*). . . . For love is always full of deceits, melancholy thoughts (*maniconie*), suspicions, regrets, and sorrows.”⁸⁹ At one extreme love melancholy was perceived by Alberti to be closely bound up with idleness, the very antithesis of civic activity to which human beings are drawn by their very natures, further underscored by the speaker’s admonition to his scholarly listeners that they “assiduously pursue good letters and arts, and flee from all idleness, all lasciviousness, and all venereal and frenzied love (*amore venereo e furioso*).”⁹⁰ At the other extreme, however, highlighted by the *Delle comodità*, Alberti testified that a scholarly escape from the worldly kind of melancholy instigated by idleness and illicit love may well set the stage for another form of melancholy, this time instigated by a combination of the scholar’s solitary loneliness and an amorous desire to be united with an infinitely removed object.

Thus, to those arguing that they they only wished, by their studious retreat from society, to transfer their quest for “amorous pleasures” (*piaceri amorosi*) from material objects to objects of the mind, Alberti warned of a continuing danger in this as well. For melancholy, he alerted his readers, often undermines the best efforts of these “lovers of the mind.” Thus, in his advice to those desirous of carving out a career in letters, Alberti warned that they need to take special precaution against melancholy, which is liable to visit them in their bookish seclusion “through the continuous tedium of letters, through many sleepless nights, through excessive diligence, and above all, through profound thoughts of the mind (*soprafatti dai profondi pensieri dello animo*).”⁹¹

Owing to his civic bias, it is true, Alberti tended to look for the remedies to literary malaise in a healthy communal life, that is, in a mind unperturbed by the kind of disturbances condemned in the *Della famiglia*. In corresponding fashion, reinforced by his celebrated

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁸⁹ Alberti, *Della famiglia*, lib. 2, in *Opere volgari*, I, 97. The speaker is Lionardo.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁹¹ Alberti, *Delle comodità*, in *Opusculi morali*, p. 144.

role as a foremost Renaissance architect and art theorist, he subscribed to the principle of moderation in all things, the very antithesis of the immoderate scholarly behavior described in the *Della comodità*. Beauty, wrote Alberti in his capacity as art theorist, “is a kind of harmony and concord of all the parts to form a whole which is constructed according to a fixed number, and a certain relation and order, as symmetry, the highest and most perfect law of nature, demands.”⁹² Geometrically proportioned architecture, Alberti believed with heavy reliance on the ancient Roman theorist Vitruvius (fl. 15 B.C.), is frozen music, and music, fluid architecture.⁹³ It was on the identical basis of “mathematical” proportion that Alberti indicated his aversion to extremes in other areas of human life, including, we are to infer, the extreme of melancholy genius. Alberti’s vision of universal “harmony and concord,” in principle at least, had no place for melancholy in its inner sanctum. On the contrary, Alberti looked on melancholy as a threat to the integrity of his symmetrical cosmos, declaring it to be disruptive of, rather than conducive to, the

⁹² Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, lib. IX, cap. 2, cited in Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1600* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940, 1962), p. 15. Cf. Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: Warburg Institute, 1949; rev. ed., Alec Tiranti, 1962, 1971), pp. 7, 33. On Alberti’s aesthetic principles, revealed in theoretical treatments of sculpture and painting as well as of architecture, see Blunt, pp. 1 ff.; Wittkower, pp. 3 ff., 33 ff.; and Dorothy Koenigsberger, *Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking: A History of Concepts of Harmony, 1400–1700* (Sussex, Eng.: Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 7 ff. For corresponding theories of music contemporaneous with Alberti’s aesthetic speculations see Claude V. Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), esp. chs. 1–4, pp. 1–87, and for the literary ideal of harmonious decorum in great favor during Alberti’s time, Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968).

⁹³ For Alberti’s views in this regard see Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, esp. pp. 110 ff., with Vitruvius’ architectural principles noted at pp. 13–15 and passim. The mathematical underpinning of this aesthetic concept was subsequently reiterated by the Franciscan Luca Pacioli (ca. 1450–1520) in his *Summa di arithmetica, geometria, proportioni, e proportionalità* (Venice: Jacobus Paganino de Paganinis, 1494), fol. 2^{r-v}. A pupil of the painter Piero della Francesca, Pacioli argued, with the principle of proportion uniting them, that mathematically grounded arts such as architecture, sculpture, and painting were deserving of inclusion in the liberal arts. On this educational campaign see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 44, and R. Emmett Taylor, *No Royal Road: Luca Pacioli and His Times* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1952), esp. p. 183. Locating music at the center of this campaign, but inexplicably omitting the key role of Alberti in its propagation, is Palisca, *Musical Thought*, esp. ch. 12, pp. 333 ff.

kinds of musical concordances which he sought to reproduce after their divinely constructed paradigm.

This is not to say, underscored in his treatise on painting, that Alberti rejected the essential divinity of art. Indeed, among the ancients invoked by Alberti to verify art's divine origin was one who was also central to Ficino. Hermes Trismegistus, wrote Alberti, maintained that "sculpture and painting arose with religion," for which reason he is reported to have informed his disciple Asclepius: "Human beings, being mindful of their nature and origin, phantasized gods from the similitude of their own countenance."⁹⁴ But when it came to the question of whether melancholy can play a constructive part in the shaping of divinely inspired images by the artist, Alberti decisively parted company with Ficino. While implying an extension of scholarly melancholy to the sphere of the pictorial arts by exhorting the painter to be learned in the liberal arts and sciences, Alberti no more made this an argument on behalf of melancholy in one domain than in the other. Endorsing the thesis that, among the pictorial arts, "painting is truly most worthy of a liberal and very noble mind,"⁹⁵ Alberti believed melancholy to be as injurious to the practitioners of the visual arts as to their literary counterparts.

The combined effect of Alberti's Ciceronian and Vitruvian paradigms, then, was to provoke him into discouraging melancholy in both the citizen of the state in general and in the scholar, poet, and artist in particular. For Alberti the appropriate remedy for psychological affliction was tempered moderation, as applicable to matters of the scholarly love of knowledge and of the aesthetic love of beauty as to matters of material love. Yet even as Alberti voiced his warnings against the excessive love of learning, he indicated at the same time that he had detected in his favored profession a source of melancholy which could not fully be explained away by its alleged abuses.

In this regard Alberti can be said not only to have mirrored a concept of pathological alienation labeled "heroic love" by the physicians, a variety of melancholy. He also intimated a key notion of Ficino's concurrent Platonic revival, which attempted to overcome

⁹⁴ Alberti, *La pittura*, trans. Ludovico Domenichi (Venice: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1547), lib. II, fol. 19^v. For the original Latin text see, among its early printed editions, *De pictura praestantissima . . .*, ed. Thomas Venatorius (Basel: Bartholomaeus Westheimer, 1590).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 20^v.

the contradiction discerned by Alberti between civic and scholarly-artistic demands by positing a reciprocal relation between them. Whereas Ficino, however, conceived of this relationship as one between inferior civic demands and superior contemplative ones, Alberti, conversely, conceived of the relationship as one between overriding civic demands and subordinate scholarly endeavors applicable to its operations. Visually reinforcing this reciprocation between civic engagement and scholarly-artistic theorization in Alberti's mind was his own specialty of architecture.⁹⁶

As illustrated by Alberti, then, a need for at least occasional solitary retreat from the community by the humanist scholars was not the only cause of their complaints against unwanted bouts of melancholy. A further cause of this condition, as Alberti poignantly points up, is the scholar's inborn tendency to pursue his goals in excess of the injunction for moderation or temperance. In sum, the humanist vision set forth by Alberti was conditioned by a conscious Ciceronian revival taking place in his day calling for a combination of political harmony, ethical moderation, and rhetorical eurythmics corresponding to the aesthetic balance and symmetry theorized by Vitruvius. The rhetorical mode of his thinking also found a fitting counterpart in poetic theory which, though barely in its germinating stages in Alberti's own time, will be observed in a later chapter to reach its full flowering in the century to follow. This poetic theory, to be presented as one of several deterring lines of resistance to the vogue of melancholy genius instigated by Ficino, was famously set forth in his *Ars poetica* by the Roman poet Horace (65 B.C.–8 A.D.).⁹⁷ Following the aesthetic guidelines of their ancient mentor, as we will point out in its place, the Horatians, in fundamental resonance with the ideal of aesthetic equilibrium set forth by Alberti, tended to reject passionate extremes in the act of poetic and artistic expression, preferring in their place the sober rules of reason.

⁹⁶ Thus, according to Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 7, Alberti "thinks of architecture entirely as a civic activity." Indicating that Alberti attended some meetings of Ficino's Platonic circle is Arnaldo della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze* (Florence: Tipografia G. Carnesecchi e Figli, 1902), pp. 577–79.

⁹⁷ See below, pp. 234 ff.

* * *

In none of the foregoing expositions of the civic ideal, including that of Alberti, is there to be found any express reference to Ficino's doctrine of melancholy genius. The attitudes indicated therein suggest largely a pre-Ficinian view of the scholarly affliction *par excellence* that the quattrocento humanists sometimes admitted to even as they did their best to expunge it from their presence. There were exceptions to this general rule, however, thereby allying a given humanist writer not only with medical theorists tending to denigrate melancholy as a hindrance to the scholarly profession, but also pitting him against a concurrent philosophical theory that would transform melancholy from an obstacle into a facilitator of the scholarly enterprise. An example is found in a 1457 letter of advice addressed to the Mantuan ruler Ludovico Gonzaga by the Florentine emigré Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481).

In answer to a query from Ludovico about how he might best handle his son Federigo's severe bouts of depression, Filelfo optimistically responded that "your Federigo is a natural melancholic. But Aristotle teaches that all melancholics are ingenious (*ingeniosos*), a thing to be marveled at, since they are given to cogitation by nature." Notwithstanding his acknowledgment of the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius, however, Filelfo did not thereby see cause to encourage Federigo's affliction; on the contrary, he still sought its cure. Inasmuch as melancholy is widely associated with idleness, Filelfo advised Ludovico, Federigo is urged to study with still greater zeal, "lest from a very sad mode of life he make himself completely subject to the black bile."⁹⁸ Though here appearing to flirt with a theory of melancholy genius as it was contemporaneously being reformulated and popularized by Ficino, Filelfo's counsel to Ludovico Gonzaga appears to have its basic affiliations more with the medical traditions seeking to eradicate melancholy than with the jointly Platonic-Aristotelian traditions encouraging melancholy as a mark of genius. Paradoxically, however, as illustrated by his contemporary Alberti, Filelfo's injunction for greater study on Federigo's part to

⁹⁸ Francesco Filelfo, *Epistolarum*, lib. XIV (Paris: André Bocard & Batigant, 1461), sig. B viii^v. Also cited in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 250–51n. On Filelfo's earlier affiliations with the Florentine circle of Ficino, where, we can surmise, he was made familiar with, but rejected, a theory of melancholy genius, see Della Torre, *Academia Platonica*, p. 819.

counteract the melancholy of idleness could well mean only the substitution of one cause of melancholy for another.

Likewise revealing awareness of the Aristotelian genial doctrine without attempting to incorporate it into his civic outlook, as evidenced by his *De institutione reipublicae*, was the Sienese humanist Francesco Patrizi (1413–1492). Inasmuch as the solitary “flees the concourse of men, and is not compelled to obey the laws or legal judgments, or to comply with legitimate authority,” as Patrizi expressly turned a famous Terentian adage to the advantage of civic humanism, “nothing whatever can be more pernicious, and nothing more alien from human nature (*nihilque magis ab humana natura alienum*).”⁹⁹ And one of the most visible signs of solitude’s “alien” character, Patrizi typically pointed out, is the solitary’s attraction to the condition termed *melancholia* by the physicians. Pointing up the reciprocal effects of solitude and melancholy on one another, with solitude encouraging melancholy and melancholics in turn seeking out solitude, Patrizi contended in an affiliated political writing, *De regno et regis institutione*, that it is the basic penchant of a melancholic, confirmed by the ancient writers, “to hate the gathering of men, to flee conversation, to avoid companionship, to pursue solitary isolation, to torment himself, and to scorch his liver.”¹⁰⁰

Among the illustrious ancients validating this observation for Patrizi was Aristotle, who, he surmised, correctly discerned a foremost danger of solitude in its accompanying melancholy; the sorry plight of these, Aristotle reputedly recognized, is that, “being vexed both in mind and in body, assiduously gnawed upon, vehemently desiring, and acquiring much but digesting little, they are always in need of medicine.” Yet even as Patrizi called on Aristotle approvingly in one respect, he opposed him in another. The hub of this disagreement lay in the dictum, ascribed to Aristotle by popular acclaim, that melancholics “excel in lofty thoughts and great genius.” It followed for Patrizi that if solitary seclusion could not be justified from his

⁹⁹ Francesco Patrizi da Siena [= Franciscus Patricius Sanensis], *De institutione reipublicae libri novem* (Paris: Impressorum opera . . . Petri Vidove du Pré, 1520), lib. I, tit. 3, fol. VII^r. Patrizi composed this tract shortly after his banishment from his native city in 1457. He was subsequently raised to the bishopric of Gaëta.

¹⁰⁰ Patrizi, *De regno et regis institutione libri XXXI* (Paris: Apud Aegidium Gorbinum, 1582), lib. V, tit. 15, fol. 223^r. Also found under title *Discorsi de'l reverendo Patrio Sanese vescovo di Gaïeta . . .*, trans. Giovanni Fabrini Fiorentino da Figline (Venice: Aldus, 1545; Per comin de Trino di Monferrato, 1547).

civic point of view, neither could melancholy in solitude's attendance. Rightfully ridiculing the contention that melancholy is a contributor to genius, Patrizi averred, was the Roman paragon of civic activism Cicero, who found it to be as much a detriment to human virtue as solitude in its affiliation. That the upholders of this faulty theory sometimes called on the teachings of astrology to lend buttressing to their argument, Patrizi added, in truth did it more harm than good, since such melancholy solitaires said to be subject to Saturn's influence, "being inclined to envy, sorrow, fraud, avarice, and laziness," only confirmed degenerate traits likewise popularly assigned to their dominating planet.¹⁰¹

For Patrizi, much as for his contemporary admirer of the Roman republic Platina, a civic-based critique of the melancholy-solitude nexus did not necessarily exclude a critique addressed to autocratic princes. Just as the preceding observations about the detriments of melancholy apply to mankind in general, concluded Patrizi, they also necessarily apply to the princely rulers of men. Melancholy sorrow, exclaimed Patrizi without reference to any exonerating factors, "is both useless and unseemly to princes (*principibus inutilis & indecora est*)." The good prince is advised to relinquish, accordingly, not only "that harsh and bitter sadness, a pernicious and savage thing," but also the solitary way of life which is its principal fosterer.¹⁰²

Patrizi's express application of his civic ideal to a prince, nevertheless, an example of the so-called "mirror-for-princes" manuals proliferating in his day,¹⁰³ points up an underlying paradox which lay beneath his humanist counsel. For in appealing to princes Patrizi was also appealing to those who occupied an echelon existing above the norms of the communities over which they ruled. The ancient paragon which the humanist writers typically brought to bear on the prince in this capacity was not the average Greek or Roman, but the hero aspiring to a rank above the average.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, lib. V, tit. 15, fol. 222^{r-v}.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, fol. 223^{r-v}.

¹⁰³ See, e.g., Skinner's essay in Schmitt et al., eds. *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 423-24. As in the parallel case of Platina, Patrizi's dedication of the *De regno* to Alfonso of Aragon suggests that the opposition between the republican ideal and one of inherited monarchy is not always so sharply drawn as Hans Baron suggests. The *De institutione*, however, with its overt appeal to republican principles and composed, Patrizi's letters inform us, while he was in touch with a number of Florentine friends (see *Crisis*, p. 437), better meets the requirements of Baron's thesis.

As a kind of “heroic” lover of the truth, the humanists were generally compelled to acknowledge, the scholar is more disposed than the usual run of men to fall into a state of melancholy. By exploiting the heroic motif, that is to say, the civic humanists themselves can be said to have planted seeds which, once sprouted, would encourage the liberation of the mind on the wings of melancholy genius. Thus, while generally holding melancholy to be a just desert for the violation of the Aristotelian imperative for socialization, the humanists also came to serve as a crucial medium for the ennoblement of the downcast and sorrowful hero serving as a mainstay for the subsequent revaluation of melancholy. Much as the Renaissance medical writers, by their concept of *amor heroicus*, can be said to have adumbrated a doctrine of melancholy genius by their acknowledgment that melancholics sometimes surpass the normal range of human intellect and talent, so did the Renaissance humanists do the same by their imaginative conjuration of ancient melancholy heroes. For the ancient heroes were notable, the humanists acknowledged, not only for spending long periods in solitary seclusion, but also for aspiring to objectives exceeding the golden mean. On both counts, as the Aristotelian author of the *Problemata* above all instructed them, heroes are more prone to melancholy than the usual run of men.

* * *

Of the ancient mythical heroes standing out for the early Renaissance humanists as paradigms for their scholarly predicament, foremost among them was the demigod Prometheus. Pointing the way to an expressly civic application of the Promethian myth was Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375). “They who have been created by nature rude and ignorant,” wrote Boccaccio in his *De genealogia deorum*, “become, if they are not instructed to the contrary, vile brutes and beasts.” To meet this educational need Boccaccio declared to have risen up among men “a second Prometheus,” that is, “a learned man” (*doctus homo*) who, seizing heretofore rude human beings “as if they were made of stone, creates them anew, teaches and instructs them, and, by his demonstrations, turns them by means of morals from natural into civil men, eminent in science and virtue.”¹⁰⁴ At

¹⁰⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, *De genealogia deorum* (Basel: Apud Jo. Hervagium, 1532), lib. IV, cap. 44, p. 101. On the use of the Promethian myth by the civic human-

the same time, as brought out the following century by the Sienese humanist Patrizi, the mythical image of Prometheus also sometimes assumed for the Italian humanists the countenance of a dejected and melancholy contemplative more at home in solitary isolation than in civic engagement.

Thus, under the heading "Concerning sorrow, and the black bile" in his *De regno*, Patrizi envisaged the affliction of melancholy sorrow as "that eagle which the poets represent as continuously striking at the heart of Prometheus as he was bound to the mountain of the Caucasus. That is to say, it is sad and continuous thought which they hold as hovering over one assiduously in contemplation of the stars."¹⁰⁵ Unlike his younger Florentine contemporary Ficino, however, who would discover in the Promethian myth a prime exemplar for his doctrine of melancholy genius, Patrizi rejected the suggestion that the torment of melancholy symbolized by the suffering of Prometheus is capable of displaying a favorable side. For he properly understood that if melancholy can be legitimized as the mark of genius, as Aristotle was said to maintain, so can solitude which is its cultivator.

Another mythical hero proving to have significant applicability to the uses and cultural goals of the Renaissance humanists was Hercules, a motif for which Salutati's allegorically conceived *De laboribus Herculis* can be said to have pointed the way.¹⁰⁶ And like the Promethian motif, the Herculean motif, so far as it showed its relevance to the civic-solitary debate, revealed itself to be a double-edged sword, with accent as easily placed on Hercules' anguished bouts in solitary loneliness as on his role as a model for a civic-based nobility of soul. Neatly summarizing this bipolar rendering of the Herculean motif was the Florentine merchant Matteo Palmieri (1406–1475), who, in his *Libro della vita civile*, allegorically construed the famous choice given to Hercules "at the crossroads" as one between operational prudence (*prudentia*), of primary advantage to the everyday needs of the civic body, and a higher speculative wisdom (*sapientia*) born in solitude

ists see Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, p. 95, with this passage furnished, in Latin, in a note.

¹⁰⁵ Francesco Patrizi, *De regno et regis institutione*, lib. V, tit. 15: "De tristitia, et atra bili," fol. 223^r.

¹⁰⁶ See Coluccio Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, ed. B.L. Ullman, 2 vols. (Zürich: In aedibus Thesauri Mundi, 1953). On this writing, esp. as it pertains to Salutati's theory of poetic invention, see Trinkaus, *Image*, II, 697–704.

and having as its object “an elevated consideration of supernal, admirable, and divine matters.” As distinct from mere practical prudence, stressed Palmieri, speculative wisdom contains within itself “profound intellect and true knowledge of most precious things, from which it is called more the excellent science of divine than of human matters.” For this reason, explained Palmieri, “the elevated talents of those who disdain the world, and seek and meditate on celestial and divine goods are called wise rather than prudent men, because prudence only has to do with human matters.”¹⁰⁷

In conjunction with his allegorical interpretation of Hercules’ “two choices,” Palmieri could have pointed out, but did not, the fits of melancholy reported by the Aristotelian *Problemata* to have been suffered by Hercules in pursuit of “celestial and divine goods.” If he had done so, he would have corroborated a similar lesson elicited from the myth of Prometheus by, among others, the Sienese humanist Patrizi. However, the affliction of melancholy aside, Palmieri implicitly agreed with Patrizi in perceiving solitary contemplation to be, not a rejection of the civic ideal, but an opportunity to cultivate the mind so that it could contribute to a richer civic experience. For Palmieri prudent civic engagement did not, as it would for Ficino, act as an inferior springboard to a higher wisdom optimally cultivated in solitude; on the contrary, the wisdom forged in solitary speculation and contemplation ideally fed back into, and conditioned, the everyday moral or ethical options of the human being in his role as a “political animal.” Nevertheless, by calling on the Hercules myth to illustrate the superiority of contemplative wisdom over active prudence, Palmieri established the kind of critical foothold within civic humanism which would allow Ficino and his followers to find a solitary way, with the help of “heroic melancholy,” out of its finite constraints.

¹⁰⁷ Matteo Palmieri, *Libro della vita civile* (Florence: Per li heredi di Philippo di Giunta, 1529), fols. 31^r, 41^v. The classical locus for this mythical motif is Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II, 1. For Petrarca’s anticipation of this theme see Theodore E. Mommsen, “Petrarch and the Story of the Choice of Hercules,” *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Eugene F. Rice, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1959), 175–96, and for its impact on Renaissance art, Erwin Panofsky, *Hercules am Scheideweg*. . . Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, XVIII (Leipzig/Berlin, 1930), and Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1960; repr., New York: Harpers, 1969), pp. 177–78n. On Palmieri’s astrological rendering of the “choice of Hercules” theme see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 251.

The dilemma posed by mythical heroes like Prometheus and Hercules for the civic humanists is that, having been endowed by the ancient writers with powers transcending ordinary human limits, they symbolized an inability to remain contained by the civic norm. Translated into the language of the medical writers, their anguished plight could be identified as heroic love, a species of melancholy, induced by a yearning for the infinite. In this regard, as we will now see, the quandary of the civic humanists corresponded to the quandary of the physicians. For while the training of the civic humanists, like that of the medical writers, dictated a normative, or regulative, approach to the problem of human alienation, they were also sometimes forced into the acknowledgment that the finite rules of natural and human life are not fully adequate to fulfill the highest aspirations of their being. For this they also needed to bring their civic ideals into line with higher philosophical and theological imperatives. Already Petrarca had pointed their way to this higher aim of the humanist mission which, as we will shortly see, culminated in the Florentine Platonists.

To better meet this transcendent goal of their profession these humanist lovers of wisdom—of Palmieri's *sapientia*—also reluctantly but necessarily granted to the solitary way of life, despite its well-known affinity with melancholy, a legitimate place in their considerations about desirable human behavior. While the civic humanists sometimes rationalized this concession with the proviso that the fruits of solitary leisure should be put to the advantage of the active civic life, Petrarca's example suggested that solitary study, together with its attendant melancholy, may have more in common with an inner spiritual needs of the human being transcending civic goals. Viewed from this larger humanist perspective, the "heroic" soul is simultaneously located within a horizontal network of finitely temporal communal relationships and on a vertical ladder leading from finite nature to the infinitely removed Creator.

This dual positioning of the human soul by the trecento and quattrocento humanists manifested itself in two separate but interrelated ramifications. The first ramification consists of a humanist ambivalence toward a stringently defined concept of civic activity and responsibility standing in opposition to one calling for solitary intellectual and artistic productivity, and the second ramification, of a humanist ambivalence toward the value of moderation, one of the basic ancient virtues, resisting the urge of human genius to break out of the

restraints imposed by social norms. In both of these respects the humanists correspondingly indicated ambivalence toward melancholy, which represented for them at once the violation of their normative conception of the human being and a God-given natural aid for their liberation from finitely regulative restraints.

Even as early Renaissance humanism appears by and large to have thrown major obstacles in the way of the formulation of a full-blown theory of melancholy genius such as came to pass under Ficinian auspices, then, it also provided an appropriate intellectual framework, intimated in its favored heroic motif, for contraverting and overcoming those obstacles. Nevertheless, as illustrated by Filelfo, the mere invocation of the nature-based Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius was not necessarily sufficient to save the reputation of the black bile, since, deprived of linkage to the corresponding Platonic inspiration theory capable of instigating melancholy to higher supernatural goals, it could still be viewed as a disease to which especially gifted minds were prone. Before concluding the present chapter, accordingly, we will now encounter some more patently overt anticipations of Ficino's genial theory than the conventional confines of humanism, untouched by the higher philosophical concerns of Plato, tended to allow. While these foreshadowings of Ficino's genial theory can be shown to have evolved within rather than without the boundaries of traditional humanism, they also expressly threatened to break out of those boundaries by locating the object to which genius aspires beyond finite limits.

* * *

A full millennium before either St. Antonino or Ficino had entered upon the scene, St. Augustine had eloquently proclaimed in prayerful words to God gracing the first page of his confessions: "Thou hast created us for Thee, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee" (*Fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*).¹⁰⁸ Centuries later Dante put the same idea in poetic form (*Purgatorio*, XVIII, 28–33), this time around, however, reflecting the love-centered tradition of stilnovism to which he adhered: "Just as fire is drawn upward into the heights, being so formed as to seek its own durable

¹⁰⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, cap. 1, in Migne, *PL*, 32:661.

element there, so does the enraptured soul become seized by desire, which is a spiritual motion, and can never rest short of enjoying its beloved object." This is the same amorous passion which Petrarca, in his own poetic contributions to the stilnovist legacy, variously termed, in association with his famed *accidia*, his "great passion" (*gran passione*) and "sweet pain" (*dolce pianto*). Neither Dante nor Petrarca expressly associated their amatory passions, resembling the condition termed love melancholy by the physicians, with Plato's divine frenzy theory. Nor, for that matter, did they expressly associate their rare poetic powers with Plato's theory, which would have established, through the bond between the love and poetic frenzies, an inner connection between their amatory yearnings and their keen imaginative powers. More directly pointing this way was Petrarca's contemporary Boccaccio, who formally articulated a philosophical justification for the passionate effusions of a poet only vaguely hinted at by either Dante or Petrarca.

Being familiar with the common accusation of the clerics that poetic deceit is a favored seductive device of the Devil, Boccaccio retorted that true poetry "is a certain exquisite fervor of invention, both in speech and writing, which proceeds from the bosom of God."¹⁰⁹ Far from poetry having been placed in the service of Satan to lead men astray from the divine truth, Boccaccio protested against its detractors, poetry has been given to men by God to help guide them to that exalted truth. The poet, as described by Boccaccio, is a kind of holy theologian and mystic who dresses his vision of sacred truth in allegorical symbols of fiction.

The poetic theory here presented by Boccaccio, in effect transforming it into a form of theology—that is, *theologia poetica*—can be most directly traced to the Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Ion*, the effect of which was to counter a far less flattering portrait of poetry, presented by Plato in his *Republic*, banning it from the ideal state for introducing seductive obstacles to the rational quest for truth. Although

¹⁰⁹ Boccaccio, *De genealogia deorum*, lib. XIV, cap. 7, p. 560. For an Eng. trans. of this fourteenth book see *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's 'Genealogia Deorum Gentilium'*, ed., trans. Charles G. Osgood (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1930, 1956; Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1930, 1956), with this passage at p. 39. For a treatment of this theme in Boccaccio see Trinkaus, *Image*, II, 693–97.

the still untranslated dialogues giving rise to the Platonic inspiration theory were unknown during the centuries leading up to Boccaccio's time, the theme of divine frenzy with which it was integrally bound up was not, having become a commonplace topos in ancient and medieval literature.¹¹⁰ Significantly, however, in his reception and republication of this topos Boccaccio said nothing about the need for a natural concomitant to the divine frenzy, a fundamental component of the Ficinian genial theory to follow.

Likewise endorsing Plato's divine frenzy theory were the Florentine humanist-chancellors Salutati and Bruni, who demonstrated thereby that a view of the divine origin of poetic insight did not necessarily clash with a civic humanist outlook. Pointing out a similarity between the acts of prophetic vaticination (*vaticinatio*) and poetizing (*actus poetandi*), Salutati declared, with Plato his authority, that "at the very moment when the poet composes, he has proclaimed a prophecy."¹¹¹ Along similar lines Bruni, on the heels of a Latin rendering of Plato's *Phaedrus* accompanying his better known Aristotelian translations, reiterated Plato's opinion "that there are two kinds of frenzy, one of which, issuing from human disease, is justifiably detested and held in contempt, and the other, issuing from a divine alienation of the mind (*ex divina mentis alienatione*), is encouraged and admired."¹¹² In neither of these accounts of divine inspiration, any more than in that put forth earlier by Boccaccio, is there any indication that the dual potential extended to frenzy also extends to melancholy. If Salutati and Bruni can be said to have prefigured in some degree Ficino's doctrine of inspired genius, it was solely through the agency of Plato without any further help from Aristotle.

Poetry was not the only beneficiary of the Platonization of the creative imagination by its early Renaissance theorists. Likewise profiting from this development were the visual arts, also, as a glance

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1953), excurs. 8, pp. 474–75. For the Renaissance restatement of Plato's poetic frenzy theory see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), passim, with its Platonic provenance indicated at pp. 250–51. The theoretical context of this doctrine is more briefly presented by Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, "Humanism and Poetics," in Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism*, III, 85–169.

¹¹¹ Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, lib. I, cap. 2, I, 16.

¹¹² Leonardo Bruni, *Epistolarum libri VIII*, ed. L. Mehus, 2 vols. (Florence: Apud Bernardi Paperinii, 1741), II, lib. VI, 1, p. 37.

at the relevant texts will show, in its pre-Ficinian stages largely accomplished independently of Aristotelian naturalist influences. According to this outlook, such genial powers as produced masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and architecture derived from the same divine source as generated masterpieces in the literary arts.

As in the parallel case of poetry, Plato himself had placed a formidable obstacle in the way of the ennoblement of the visual arts by excluding painters among its practitioners from his ideal state. Indeed, it would appear from the reasoning employed in the *Republic* (X, 605) that it was precisely poetry's resemblance to painting that earned it its ignominy. The poet resembles the painter, Plato had Socrates declare, by imitating in words the inferior terrestrial forms which the painter imitates through graphic illustration. Following this comparison, Plato had bequeathed to posterity the implication that the poet's exclusion from the well-ordered state equally applies to the visual artist. Unhappily for the future prestige of the visual arts, when the poets were restored to his good graces in dialogues like the *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, Plato failed to make the same case for their counterparts among the painters, sculptors, and architects. It would remain for various of his followers to extend to their number the sanctified vigor of the divine frenzy which Plato had granted to poets.

If a campaign to reverse the low opinion of the visual arts indicated in Plato's *Republic* were to succeed, thereby making them more receptive to the divine frenzy theory, it was first necessary to reverse a bias inherent in the literary traditions upholding the superiority of the writer's pen over the painters brush or sculptor's chisel. Heralding this longstanding bias dominating over late antiquity and the Middle Ages was Seneca (ca. 5–65), who declared in an epistle: "For I do not consent to admit painting into the list of liberal arts, any more than sculpture, marble-working, and other helps toward luxury."¹¹³ This opinion, reinforced by an asceticism as characteristic of late Greco-Roman pagan as early Christian thought, was premised on the belief that images forged by hand in the grime of the material world are inferior to images conceived in the mind before being put to paper. Being commonly viewed as types of mechanical expertise

¹¹³ Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1920), no. 87 (18), Vol. III, p. 359.

more dependent on skills of the body than insights of the mind, the techniques of painting, sculpture, and architecture were customarily subordinated to the higher techniques of the literary and mathematical arts, that is, of the *artes liberales*, deemed by the early Christians to be God-given handmaidens to theology.

Responding to this prejudice on the threshold of the quattrocento, the early Renaissance educational theorist Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370–1444) observed in his *De ingenuis moribus* with a hint of regret that “drawing (*designativa*) is not currently included among the liberal studies, except so far as it perhaps pertains to the art of writing.”¹¹⁴ A few decades later Maffeo Vegio (1407–58) was more openly insistent that figurative design (*figurativa*) had inadvisedly been excluded from the liberal arts.¹¹⁵ For Vegio a complete education came to mean instruction “in both letters and the honest arts” (*litteris ac bonis artibus*).¹¹⁶ The transference of poetic to artistic theory during the early Renaissance, then, was not accomplished without resistance. If it were to succeed, a thoroughgoing reconstruction of artistic theory would have to be carried out in which the visual arts would need to break out of the traditional corporeal restrictions that had been placed upon them, corresponding to the subordination of the mechanical to the liberal arts in medieval educational theory.

Though the Platonic movement radiating from Florence in the late quattrocento must be counted as a crucial factor in this liberation of the visual arts from their late ancient and medieval constraints, it was well prepared by prior developments in both poetic and artistic theory. If the visual arts were to gain excess to the divine frenzy of Plato, it would be necessary for them first to gain equality with the literary disciplines, including poetry, among the liberal arts. Such equality could be attained only after it was determined that the artist, just as the poet to which he is compared, requires learning to inform his artistic skill. Once this admission is made, the

¹¹⁴ Pier Paolo Vergerio, *De ingenuis moribus & studiis liberalibus* (Venice: Impressum per Baptistam de Sessa Mediolanensem, 1491), sig. d vii'. This tract was composed ca. 1402. For Eng. trans. see William Harrison Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press), with this passage at p. 107.

¹¹⁵ Maffeo Vegio, *De educatione liberorum et eorum claris moribus libri sex: A Critical Text of Books I–III*, ed. Sister Maria Walburg Fanning (Wash. D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 1933), lib. III, cap. 4, pp. 105–106.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 1, p. 51.

question still remains open of whether the learning of the artist is enough, to which the Platonists needed only reply that any deficiency discoverable therein is readily remedied by a divine impetus.

A guiding precept of those seeking to raise the dignity of the visual arts to that of poetry, the first of this two-stage apotheosis of the visual arts, ironically lay in the same comparison between them leading Plato to ban them both in his ideal state. Memorably capsulizing the underlying equality of the two kinds of art is the maxim of the ancient lyricist Simonides of Ceos (ca. 556–514 B.C.) that “painting is mute poetry (*muta poesis*), and poetry, a speaking picture (*pictura loquens*),”¹¹⁷ a notion further crystallized in the Horatian maxim: “As painting, so poetry” (*Ut pictura poesis*).¹¹⁸ The intent here, however, far from being one of casting obloquy on the visual arts, was rather to raise their stature to the exalted level of poetry. It was with this intent in mind that an early Renaissance art theorist, Cennino Cennini (ca. 1370–1440), declared in a handbook on the subject that “painting justly deserves to be enthroned next to theory, and to be crowned with poetry,” and that a still more famous art theorist of the next generation, Alberti, urged the artist’s familiarity most especially with geometry among the arts and sciences, but also, in geometry’s company, with the arts of oratory, history, and poetry. While it may be true, as Professor Blunt has maintained, that Alberti’s “definitions of the arts do not include any reference to religion and are entirely framed in human terms,” it is also true that Alberti, by placing the visual arts on parity with the literary arts, helped set the stage for their subsequent divinely infused rendering by the Florentine Platonists.¹¹⁹ For once the image making of poets was imbued by the Platonists with the supermundane powers

¹¹⁷ See, e.g., Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 53.

¹¹⁸ Horace, *Ars poetica*, 361. On Simonides’ antecedent maxim, with emphasis on its reception by Leonardo da Vinci, see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 53. For the overall impact of this precept on Renaissance artistic theory see W. Rensselaer Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: W.W. Norton: 1967).

¹¹⁹ Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 11. For the Cennini reference see *Il libro dell’arte*, trans. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1933), sect. I, chap. I, excerpted in Elizabeth G. Holt, *A Documentary History of Art*, 2 vols., ed. Elizabeth G. Holt (New York: Doubleday, 1947, 1957), I, 137, with corresponding excerpts from Alberti’s *Della pictura* and *Della architectura* at pp. 205 ff. and 230–31. Cf. Alberti, *On Painting* trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale, 1956; rev. ed. 1966, 1979), bk. III, p. 90.

of divine frenzy, logic allowed, on the basis of the same parity, an extension of comparably supermundane powers to the visual artists.

The application of the Platonic frenzy theory to the visual arts could be justified, as in the case of their literary counterparts, by appeal to ancient authority. As the third-century rhetorician Callistratus had pointed out for the benefit of the Renaissance theorists of the arts—this as the result of his meditation on a sculpture of a bacchant by Scopas: “It is not the art of poets and writers of prose alone that is inspired when divine power from the gods falls on their tongues, nay, the hands of sculptors also, when they are seized by the gift of a more divine inspiration give utterance to creations that are possessed and full of madness. So Scopas moved as it were by some inspiration, imparted to the production of this statue the divine frenzy within him.”¹²⁰ Here was a statement professing the requirement of divine assistance in the fashioning of pleasing artistic shapes that was ready-made for those, most famously represented by Michelangelo but also earlier intimated by Alberti’s discernment of an underlying nexus between the fine arts and geometry, who believed that God was guiding their hands as they uncovered the pleasing forms lying beneath the dross of their materials. It is the heavenly commission of the divine frenzy, according to this vision of the artistic vocation, to enter the artist and assist his hand in liberating the Platonic forms from their worldly shackles.

If poetic and artistic theory can be said to provide one major conduit by which the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy came to bear on pre-Ficinian views of genius, another conduit was provided by abstract philosophical theory of the kind subsequently adopted by Ficino himself. Illustrating this conduit was the Byzantine emigré Basilus Bessarion (1403–1472), subsequently raised to the dignity of cardinal, who served as a leading mover of Greek studies in Italy. What distinguishes Bessarion’s version of the Platonic frenzy doctrine from that of the foregoing ones is that, in direct anticipation of Ficino, Bessarion expressly linked it to the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius; indeed, in his campaign to harmonize Plato and Aristotle, he found in the liaison between the supernatural fren-

¹²⁰ Callistratus, *Descriptions*, bound with Philostratus, *Imagines*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1931), no. 2, p. 381.

zies and natural melancholy one of his many arguments for a conciliation of the two philosophical systems. Pointing up the potential benefits of natural melancholy for the literary enterprise in which he was himself engaged, Bessarion observed that Aristotle, "when he had inquired in his *Problemata* why those who excel in philosophy, in poetry, in liberal studies, and even in the administration of the republic have been melancholics, after passing through the names of many figures from ancient to more recent times, employed the examples of Empedocles, Plato, and Socrates."¹²¹ The philosophical love of knowledge, as Bessarion pointed out before Ficino, constitutes a special case of the problem of love in general.

Plato, observed Bessarion, upon distinguishing between two forms of love, the first "terrestrial and vulgar" and the second "heavenly and completely divine," went on to characterize the latter as "an amorous and divine madness that, ensuing from a certain divine instinct, embraces him by a rapture of the mind and the contemplation of the beauty of a certain divinity." Whereas the first of these kinds of love "issues from human disease," Bessarion reiterated Plato, "the second issues from a certain divine alienation of the mind."¹²² For those desirous of reconciling Aristotle with Plato, as was Bessarion in advance of Ficino, it followed that natural melancholy can assist in the second as in the first of these expressions of amorous alienation.

* * *

The foregoing strains of thought, then, demonstrate that Ficino's doctrine of melancholy genius did not arise *in vacuo*. Its fundamental principles were well in place before Ficino came into the picture. Ficino's concept of genius, as we will see, was woven out of four

¹²¹ Basilius Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis libri quatuor* (Venice: Aldus, 1516), lib. I, cap. 3, fol. 4^v. This tract is also found in L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, vol. II: *Bessarionis 'In calumniatorem Platonis'* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1927), with this passage found on p. 27. For the scholarly context of Bessarion's Platonic defense, composed in response to an earlier tract by George of Trebizond upholding the superiority of Aristotle, see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 81 ff., and Kristeller, *Sources*, pp. 150 ff. As pointed out by Kristeller, however, p. 159, "Bessarion treats Aristotle with great respect and tends to harmonize him with Plato rather than to criticize him." Bessarion was a key participant in the Council of Ferrara-Florence, 1438-1439, in which role he sought the union of the Eastern and Western Churches.

¹²² *Ibid.*, lib. IV, cap. 2, fol. 65^r.

separate but interrelated philosophical notions preceding him in time, the first two elicited from Plato, the third from a work popularly but spuriously attributed to Aristotle, and the fourth from the occult traditions of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism. The first notion consisted of an inner “striving” (*conatus*) of the immortal soul to achieve reunion with the eternal Being from which it had become alienated and fragmented; the second notion, of its assistance to this end by an outside supernatural force or *inspiratio* (literally a “breathing-into”); the third notion, of a natural aid to the alienating process in the form of the melancholy humor; and the fourth notion, of an occult power resident within nature which “magically” bonds human genius with the supernatural realm of God. Ficino’s great achievement, as we will now assess more closely, was to synthesize and rework these inherited ideas in conjunction with his ambitious program to revive Plato in a Renaissance setting. Not by chance, this change coincided with a marked political shift in Florence under Medicean auspices that de-emphasized such civic engagement as was championed by the earlier quattrocento humanists and re-emphasized the potential benefits of contemplation in a state of melancholy solitude.

The critical shift from an unfavorable to favorable view of melancholy, the focus of the next chapter, was one that would absorb elements of all three perspectives on melancholy alienation treated in the present chapter—medical, technological, and humanist. In this way, as we will bring out, the humanist traditions furnished the genial theory formulated by Ficino and his circle with a crucial third component to complement those of medicine and theology. For much as the physicians, with Aristotle’s help, allowed that melancholy might as readily provoke good as ill, and much as the theologians, with Plato’s help, arrived at the same conclusion by associating melancholy with divinely arousing frenzy in tandem with its demonic counterpart, in like manner were the humanists compelled to acknowledge that such melancholy as occasionally visited them during their arduous scholarly cogitations, when kept in moderate check, might have more of a succoring than hampering effect upon their mental labors. Just as the Florentine Platonists could view themselves as taking their philosophical departure from humanism, holding its moral-based realm to constitute the first stage of a purgative ascent to a realm of pure ideas transcending the physical body, so could they also take their departure on the subject of genius from the reluctant acknowl-

edgment of some humanists that melancholy, together with the solitary way of life upon which it feeds, presents a necessary if painful stage on the road from civic mediocrity to individually "heroic" transcendence.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLATONIC REVIVAL AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FLOWERING OF A THEORY OF MELANCHOLY GENIUS

A. *Ficino's Reconstructed Genial Theory*

Human genius, according to Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), is another name for what Plato called divine frenzy. And divine frenzy, Ficino added with backing from a section of the Aristotelian *Problemata* (XXX, 1), does not work on the mind unassisted by material means. More particularly, it is furnished with an appropriate ally in the form of a moderately inflamed melancholy humor. Depending on which species of divine frenzy is working in cooperation with melancholy—mystical, prophetic, poetic, or love frenzy, according to Ficino, the result will be differing manifestations of genial forms.¹

At times, it is true, Ficino got so carried away by his Platonic raptures as to place Aristotle at great disadvantage. “It is so much better to follow Plato as a theologian than other philosophers,” he

¹ On Ficino’s pivotal role in the Renaissance Platonic revival see Della Torre, *Accademia Platonica*, pp. 563 ff.; P.O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Conant (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1943), pp. 3 ff., and *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 37 ff.; and Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 175 ff. For briefer treatments see Cassirer, *Individual and the Cosmos*, pp. 61–64; Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 88 ff.; and Rice, *Idea of Wisdom*, pp. 58 ff. Doubting the formal existence of a Florentine academy is Josephine L. Burroughs in her intro. to Ficino, *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), declaring, p. 185, that Ficino’s circle is an academy “only in name.” Spelling out this thesis more thoroughly is James Hankins, “The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, XLIV (1991), 429–75, a revisionist view consistent with Paul Grendler’s contention, *Critics of the Italian World (1530–1560)* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 136–41, that the academic movement was the result of a more authoritarian direction taken by learning in the 1540’s after Ficino was no longer on the Florentine scene. Here we will largely sidestep this question by referring to a group of scholars gravitating around Ficino with the more informal term “circle.” On Ficino’s reiteration of the genial theory presented in the *Problemata* see Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 254 ff., and Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 211–12. More currently see Schmitz, “Melancholieproblem,” pp. 147 ff., and Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 25–26.

wrote in one of his letters, "just as it is better to entrust oneself to helmsmen that are awake, rather than to those that are asleep."² That Ficino considered Aristotle to be included among the "sleeping philosophers" is made clear elsewhere in his writings, as in the further epistolary pronouncement that, "in the main, Aristotle's life was earthy, and his knowledge natural; whereas Plato, at once by knowledge and by his life, devoted himself above all to the divine."³ As for their followers, Ficino noted in another letter: "Many of the Platonists think that the soul precedes the body, but the Peripatetics think the contrary."⁴ At the crux of these assessments for Ficino, to Aristotle's detriment, lay Plato's subjection of natural causation, the cause of genius included, to higher supernatural causes emanating from a realm of eternal ideas.

Such a divisive approach to the Platonic and Aristotelian legacies on Ficino's part, nevertheless, was an exception rather than the rule. For Ficino's overall philosophical strategy, with his position on the origin of genius a prime case in point, was not to exclude Aristotelian naturalism from his favored Platonic overview of the world, but rather to subordinate it to Platonic supernaturalism. Having been medically as well as philosophically trained, Ficino proffered nature-based physiological diagnoses in conjunction with the kinds of genial alienation categorized by Plato under the rubric *furor divinus*. As he noted in his *De vita*, this time with the pseudo-Aristotle of the *Problemata* his further authority: "Although this perhaps is determined to be the divine frenzy, frenzy of this type does not incite just anybody, but only those afflicted by melancholy."⁵ Putting Ficino's view of melancholy in terms of Aristotelian teleology, it appears to correspond to

² *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. members of Language Dept, School of Economic Science, London (London: Shephard-Wallwyn, 1975; New York: Gingko Press, 1985), I, no. 41, p. 56. This translation is based on a ms. in the Riccardiana Library, Florence. For the printed texts see Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols., Basel: 1561; 2nd ed., Basel: 1576, riproduzione in fototopia a cura di M. Sancipriano, con presentazione di P.O. Kristeller, Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1959, I(2).

³ *Ibid.*, III, no. 19, p. 47. But for a loftier view of Aristotle, highlighting his appreciation of the contemplative life, cf. III, no. 13, pp. 20-21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, no. 96, p. 121.

⁵ Ficino, *De vita libri tres*, lib. I, cap. 5, in *Opera omnia*, I(1), 497. Also cited in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 259n. For the original "Aristotelian" passage prompting this concept cf. Klibansky, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 24. Ficino's *De vita* has recently appeared in a critical edition and translation as *Three Books of Life*, ed., trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989), with this passage found at pp. 116-17.

what Aristotle designated the material cause—the *causa materialis*—in the effectuation of genius.

Ficino's amalgamation of the Platonic and Aristotelian genial theories, moreover, reveals a darker demonological underbelly presuming that genius, also with the possible help of melancholy, can turned to ill as well as to good. While the two kinds of inspired genius, divine and demonic, are opposed in one way, reckoned Ficino, in another way they are related, being forms of alienation which, while outwardly exhibiting signs of the natural melancholy complexion, are inwardly motivated by forces originating beyond the bounds of finite nature. Whether we speak of evil or good genius, determined Ficino, natural causes, natural melancholy included, are strictly subordinated to supernatural causes referable to either a demonic or a divine source. This subordination of natural to supernatural incitements of genius by Ficino flows out of his larger program dedicated to the accommodation of Aristotle to Plato.

The basic constituents of demonology, as pointed out in the previous chapter, were firmly in place long before Marsilio Ficino entered on the scene. Having laid bare, through his Greek translations, many of the previously hidden philosophical sources that had impacted on this trend of medieval thought, Ficino in effect not only reformulated the scholastic synthesis to the advantage of Plato, of which the doctrine of the individual soul's immortality constituted one of its more distinctive badges.⁶ With explicit help from the eleventh century Byzantine theologian Michael Psellus (= Psellos, fl. 1050), he also revalidated the principles of demonology that was a distinctive badge of ancient Neoplatonism.⁷ As part and parcel of this demono-

⁶ Thus, according to Kristeller, *Sources*, p. 188, Ficino's "major philosophical work, . . . *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum*, deals mainly with the problem of immortality and might be described as a *Summa* on the immortality of the soul." Or again, p. 189, "Ficino became in a sense the philosopher of immortality. . . ." Concerning Ficino's immortality doctrine see also Kristeller's *Ficino*, pp. 324 ff.; Giovanni di Napoli, *L'immortalità dell'Anima nel Rinascimento* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1963), pp. 121 ff.; Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness*, II, 461 ff.; and Garin, *Cultura Filosofica*, pp. 93 ff., the latter indicating Ficino's quattrocento antecedents on this subject. On Ficino's adoption of scholastic methodology for demonstrating this thesis see Kristeller's article "The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino," *Traditio*, II (1944), 257–318, repr. in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), 35–98.

⁷ On Ficino's demonological assumptions see Thorndike, *Magic*, IV, ch. 63, pp. 562 ff., with an opening reference to Ficino's translation of Psellus' *De daemonibus*

logical outlook, Ficino gave intellectual respectability to the view that the Devil is able to stir up and utilize melancholy in his victims when it suits his wicked purposes.

The upside of the Platonic outlook received and reformulated by Ficino, then, is the belief that extraordinary powers, among them mystical ecstasy and luminosity, philosophical profundity, prophetic acuity, and poetic and artistic creativity attest to the supernatural foundation of human genius. This outlook was necessarily tied by the Platonists to the presumption of an immortal soul, the deprivation of which, they inferred, would reduce human genius to a mere biological function shut off from divine intervention. It is an outlook, however, that also displayed a sinister downside in the demonological mode of thought fostering the witch-craze, with a supposition by the Platonists that genius can be divinely inspired the flip side of the coin from a supposition that genius can be demonically inspired. Viewed from this darker underside of the genius question, as we have seen, melancholy is utilizable by the demons as a suitable natural agent to help break down the soul's resistance to their insinuations and attacks.

Directly relevant to both genial forms for Ficino, demonic and divine, was a belief in the therapeutic powers of music, which he considered to be, following a basic axiom of the Pythagorean legacy reaching him through Platonic mediation, of heavenly origin but with terrestrial repercussions. From a joint medical-demonological perspective Ficino held the musical harmonies to be suitable for simultaneously stilling the discordant agitations of melancholy and for putting discordant demons capable of exploiting those agitations

among his literary credits; D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, ed. G. Bing, Vol. 22 (London: Warburg Institute, Univ. of London, 1958; reprints: Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1969; University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 45 ff.; and Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 254 ff. Thus, according to Ioan Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook, forward by Mircea Eliade (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 156: "Ficino is . . . a demonologist and deals with planetary demons in his *Commentary on the Symposium*." Cf. J.B. Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's Sophist. Five Studies and a Critical Edition with Translation* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), pp. 168 ff., and Donald A. Beecher, "Quattrocento Views on the Eroticization of the Imagination," in Beecher and Ciavolella, eds. *Eros and Anteros*, pp. 54–55: ". . . just as Kramer and Sprenger had transposed amorous desire into a fully demonic medium, so Ficino now welcomed his Venerean demons into the spiritual realm." On Psellus see Cohn, *Inner Demons*, pp. 18 ff.

to flight. Conversely, from a joint medical-mystical-philosophical perspective, Ficino held music to be suitable for attracting the harmoniously driven divine frenzies of Plato into the soul and turning them, this time with the aid of melancholy in the effervescent form lauded by the Aristotelian *Problemata*, into agents of liberation from the discordances of the world.⁸ In addition, closely bound up with music in Ficino's mind, following a supposition owing to the occultly imbued ancient Neoplatonic movement rather than to Plato himself, was magic of a favorable, non-diabolical sort.

Believing that he had found justification for magic in sacred scripture itself, with the three Magi paying homage to the birth of Christ its supreme exemplars, Ficino became a foremost advocate for the admittance of certain forms of arcane studies into the Christian curriculum free of diabolical intrusion.⁹ Ficino's notable achievement in this regard was to present a systematic synthesis of Platonic supernatural not only with Aristotelian natural philosophy, but also, on the model of ancient Neoplatonic forerunners like Plotinus (205–270), Porphyry (233–304), and Iamblichus (d. ca. 330), with Hermetic and Neoplatonic occult philosophy. Underlying the Ficinian synthesis of a naturalist with supernaturalist conception of genius, in sum, was more than a conciliation of Aristotle with Plato. Also underlying that synthesis was the conciliation of ancient magicians such as Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus with Plato. Put another way, mystical theology—*theologia mystica*—became transformed under Ficinian auspices into magical theology—*theologia magica*, by means of which the art of magic came to assume a kind of mediating link between the natural and supernatural spheres of existence.¹⁰

⁸ On this subject, with special emphasis on the remedial powers of solar music, see Walker, "Ficino's Spiritus and Music," *Annales musicologiques*, I (1953), 131–50, and *Magic*, pp. 3–29; Cf. Palisca, *Musical Thought*, pp. 168–70, and Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), ch. 4, pp. 101 ff. But for an inquiry, in a northern setting, of how the identification of divine frenzy with music could also work against a theory of poetic melancholy see my article "Melancholy and the divine frenzies in the French Pléiade: Their Conflicting Roles in the art of *beaux exercices spirituels*," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 9 (1979), 81–100.

⁹ See, e.g., Stephen M. Buhler, "Marsilio Ficino's *De stella magorum* and Renaissance Views of the Magi," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43 (1990), 348–71.

¹⁰ Most notably emphasizing this feature of Ficino's philosophical outlook are Thorndike, *Magic*, IV, pp. 562 ff.; Walker, *Magic*, esp. pp. 36 ff.; and Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, 1971), pp. 62 ff., the latter who, taking note of Ficino's trans. of the *Hermetica*

Ficino can be said, accordingly, to have expanded the meaning of Thorndike's observation of a close association of melancholy and magic in the history of ideas, cited above,¹¹ to embrace divinely as well diabolically inspired magic. For Ficino, to put this melancholy-magic nexus another way, the genial powers of melancholy, the natural counterpart of divine frenzy, could be considered a special case of the occult powers of magic. Of the philosophical buttressing for this revolutionary campaign, reversing a prevailing Christian bias against magic going back to such revered early authorities as St. Augustine and St. Jerome, none speaks more cogently to the point than his influential commentary on Plato's dialogue devoted to the subject of love, the *Symposium*.

Characterizing love therein as a kind of magician or enchanter, Ficino explained that "the whole power of enchantment rests in love, and the work of love is effected by bewitchment, magic spells, and potions."¹² The doctrine of *magia amoris* here espoused by Ficino issues out of the supposition that love—Plato's divinely sent *furor amatorius*—occultly contains supernatural power, on the model of alchemy, to purify and thereby transmute the soul into successively higher states of being. It followed for Ficino, moreover, with additional assistance from the nature-based medical texts and Aristotelian *Problemata*, that the magical powers occultly residing in love are also occultly present in the melancholy humor, thereby making it a suitable material vehicle—in Aristotelian terms, a *causa materialis*—of Plato's love frenzy.

The theory of magic, Ficino reasoned, together with Platonic philosophical theory with which it represents a kindred discipline, touches on nature in its effects but ultimately refers to causes lying beyond nature. Whether choosing to express his ideas in the conventional philosophical language of Plato and Aristotle or the unconventional

prior to completing his Platonic translations, employed this theme as the organizing principle of her entire study. But for a highly critical assessment of her approach see Brian Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History," *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (1979): 287–316. For a treatment of this theme as articulated by a northern contemporary of Ficino see my *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany: State University of New York at Albany Press, 1999).

¹¹ See above, p. 33.

¹² *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium: The Text and a Translation*, ed., trans. Sears Reynolds Jayne, Univ. of Missouri Studies, Vol. XIX, no. 1 (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press), speech 6, ch. 10, p. 200. For the original Latin text of this commentary see Ficino, *Opera omnia*, II, 1120 ff., with this passage at p. 1348. Henceforth referred to as *De amore*.

arcane language of the Hermeticists and Neoplatonists, Ficino adhered to a demonological conception of the world, with his intent being to show a jointly philosophical-magical way out of a material world reputedly infested with evil demons into a heavenly place free of demonic contaminations.

Ficino's demonology, like that of his Hermetic and Neoplatonic forerunners, did not extend only to evil demons. It also extended to good demons, called angels by traditional Christian usage. The ancients, attested Ficino, attributed the magical arts to demons (*daemones*) because those supernatural beings "understand what the relationship of natural things is, what is related to each thing, and how the harmony of things can be restored wherever it is lacking." Among those "said to have been friends of the demons," he maintained, were Zoroaster and Socrates, "because of a certain similarity of their natures," and Apollonius Tyanus and Porphyry, "because of their adoration," the result being that demons (or better, "daemons," in keeping with this morally neutral meaning of the term bequeathed by the Greeks) were permitted entrance into their minds "in signs, voices, and portents" when they were awake and "in revelations and visions" when they were asleep. Being thereby capacitated to perform remarkable natural feats through the secrets occultly conveyed to them by their demonic familiars, as Ficino's presentation of this theme goes, the ancient magicians appeared to their spectators to possess powers of enchantment "equal to those of the daemons themselves."¹³

If, for Ficino, the distinction between divinely and diabolically instigated magic is not always easy to ascertain, the same can be said for the corresponding distinction between natural and demonic magic, a confusion highlighted in his acknowledgment that demons assisted the ancient philosophers and magicians in gaining access to occult powers latently residing within the marrow of nature itself. The demons are able to transmit their magical powers to their chosen adepts, as Ficino elaborated on this theme in his *De amore*, "because they know the friendship of natural things," for which reason "all of nature, from its mutual love, is called an enchantress."¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*, speech 5, ch. 10, p. 200 (*Opera omnia*, II, p. 1348).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Concerning the difficulty of distinguishing illicit demonic from licit natural magic, inasmuch as the Devil himself was often depicted by the demonological writers as a supremely gifted natural magician, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, esp. pp. 152–56, 161–78, 243–50.

Elsewhere in his writings Ficino differentiated between supernatural spirits, whether angelic or demonic, capable of producing magical marvels, and a marvel-working natural *spiritus* occultly flowing through and energizing the cosmos. However, as modern scholars familiar with his work are compelled to admit, when it came to particular cases Ficino was not always clear as to whether supernatural spirits or natural *spiritus* lay behind given marvels. By the same token, it is not always easy to tell where the supernatural effects of the divinely originated Platonic frenzies left off for Ficino and the natural effects of genial melancholy began.¹⁵

If corporeal medicine and demonology can be said to comprise two basic components of Ficino's genial theory, two further components were furnished by the humanist and mystical traditions, their connection lying in his presumption, traceable to Plotinus and conveyed to the Latin-speaking medieval world by his fifth century commentator Macrobius, that the soul's ascent to Heaven is divisible into three distinct stages: the first stage consisting of the civic virtues; the second stage, of the purgatorial virtues; and the third stage, signifying the culmination of spiritual purification, of the theological virtues.¹⁶ In this way Ficino not only reversed the subjugation of contemplative to active life favored by the civic humanists, but also found in his master Plato an appropriate philosophical vehicle for transporting the soul of the contemplative through its purgative sequence of virtues. Comprising the core of this purgative vehicle is the genial dynamic termed by Plato divine frenzy—the *furor divinus*, deprived of which, Ficino agreed with Plato, "no man has ever been great."¹⁷ In this way, as we will now spell out in more specific terms, Ficino made smooth philosophical transition not only from a concept of genius in its demonically evil form—that is, the genius of sorcery—to one of divinely inspired forms of genius such as those realized in prophets, poets, artists, philosophers, and the like. He also made smooth transition from a view of melancholy as a serviceable natural aid to demonically inspired genius, the traditional Devil's bath, to a view of melancholy as a serviceable natural aid to divinely inspired genius.

¹⁵ On this difficulty see esp. Walker, *Magic*, pp. 45 ff.

¹⁶ Ficino, *Letters*, no. 19, in Vol. I, pp. 29–30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I, no. 7, p. 14 (*Opera omnia*, I, 612).

* * *

Correlating some of the more obvious varieties of human genius with those of the Platonic inspiration theory as spelled out by Ficino, we can most precisely associate contemplative genius with the *furor mysticus*; philosophical genius (aspiring, as the root meaning of the Greek-derived word “philosophy” tells us, to the “love of wisdom”) with the *furor amatorius*; divinatory genius with the *furor propheticus*; and literary and artistic genius with the *furor poeticus*. But while acknowledging the formal distinction of the divine frenzies from one another, Ficino also called on Plato to confirm that two or more frenzies might be present in any given class of human genius. Thus, for example, the prophetic frenzy can be applied to poets as well as to prophesiers in the strict sense, inasmuch as poets are deemed to be prophets in essence who choose to garb their predictions in decorous language. By the same token the frenzy of love can be applied to poets and artists as well as to philosophers, inasmuch as the passion of love is directed not only to supreme wisdom, but also to supreme beauty. Granted, as Plato had instructed his disciples, that the variant branches of divine inspiration arise out of a common stem, they also interact with and administer to one another in the process. Their formal distinctions refer, at bottom, to functional rather than to substantive differences between them.

As to the relative status of the four types of frenzy issuing from this common stem, Ficino further maintained that “of all these, the most powerful and most noble is the amatory madness.” Why is it the most powerful? “All the others,” Ficino explained, “necessarily depend upon it.” More particularly, “we achieve neither the poetic, the religious, nor the prophetic madness without a great zeal, flaming piety, and sedulous worship of the divine. But zeal, piety, and worship, what else do we call them but love?” And why is the amatory madness the noblest of the divine frenzies? Because, answered Ficino, “to it as to an end, the others are referred; moreover, it is this which joins us most closely with God.”¹⁸

Reminiscent of the enamored Petrarca before him, if expressing his views in more systematic philosophical form, Ficino closely asso-

¹⁸ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, trans. Jayne, speech 7, ch. 15, p. 233 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1362).

ciated his amorous anguish with a corresponding sense of internal spiritual restlessness heralded by St. Augustine's earlier cited lament opening his *Confessions*. Simultaneously bemoaning and extolling his amorously restless drive to God, the inborn nature of which he termed "yearning" (*conatus*), Ficino went a crucial step beyond Augustine and Petrarca by associating that notion with both the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy and the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy alienation.¹⁹ At the same time Ficino conceded to the possibility of feigning divine frenzy under the effects of melancholy, an outcome which he specifically warned against.

In his role as physician Ficino was all too aware of the destructive potential of melancholy, in the capacity of which it acted more as a deterrent to spiritual advancement than its natural auxiliary. Pointing out that melancholics of this vulgar kind are often drawn to the religious orders, Ficino cautioned the regular clergy against allowing such gloomy types into their ranks. An admonitory example pointed out in his letters was of a monastic novice of Perugia who, he reported, out of "excessive love and zeal for the Muses," had recently fallen into such a morbid state of melancholy "that he saw black phantoms by day, and . . . was tormented by a great fear of hell." The reason that this detestable melancholic was accepted into holy orders, Ficino sarcastically charged, had less to do with what he might contribute to the spiritual life of the community he had entered than with what he might contribute to its material well-being, since he promised to bestow his inherited wealth on the Perugian monastery into which he was admitted.²⁰

Nevertheless, as perceived by Ficino, the potentially injurious effects of melancholy did not prevent it from concurrently serving as an aid to more favorable expressions of the human mind, underscoring the dual ability of the melancholy humor to promote the nobler as well as ignobler inclinations of human behavior. By associating melancholic alienation with the Platonic *furor divinus*, described in his *De*

¹⁹ In this regard Kristeller, *Ficino*, pp. 213-14, while acknowledging a connection between these two separate but intertwined themes in Ficino, has felt compelled to concede: "It is difficult to recognize a conceptual relation between the two theories. . . . In spite of a common foundation and of a recognizable affinity, they lack entirely a conceptual bond." It is our object in the following pages to highlight the basic constituents of such a conceptual bond.

²⁰ Ficino *Letters*, append., I, 174 (*Supplementum Ficinianum*, II, 46-7).

amore as “a kind of illumination of the rational soul through which God draws the soul slipping down to the lower world back to the higher,”²¹ Ficino effectively put the Aristotelian doctrine of genial melancholy into the service not only of overtly religious religious forms of genial expression such as solitary contemplation and prophecy, but also of a manifold of secular expressions of extraordinary mental and spiritual prowess that seemingly cannot be explained by reference to natural causation alone. To make credible his synthesized genial theory Ficino necessarily invested natural melancholy with an ecstatic principle comparable to that residing in the Platonic frenzies, a trait he discovered in pseudo-Aristotle’s acknowledgment of melancholy’s inherent combustibility.

At the heart of Ficino’s genial theory lay an assumption of an underlying affinity between contemplative rapture and prophetic acuity, with the divine frenzies prompting the soul beyond its corporeal limits viewed as also capable of illuminating the soul with a lucid vision of the future. The prophetic impulse pre-eminently signified for Ficino that human genius is based on something more substantial than vicissitudinous material nature. It is not by chance, Ficino pointed out in the same connection, that prophets, like their contemplative counterparts, are notable for their melancholic temperaments. While granting that such melancholy is capable of attracting unwanted demonic influences, thereby triggering false prophecies in conjunction with false ecstasies, Ficino also let be known his belief that melancholy is equally capable of inducing the ecstatic detachment of the mind from its worldly encumbrances and cleansing it of its layers of material obfuscation so that it can perceive future events as lucidly as if they are immediately present.

Recalling a commonplace topos of ancient literature associating the act of prophecy with dreaming, Ficino once wrote to an acquaintance that “the souls of men which are almost separated from their bodies because of a temperate disposition and a pure life may in the abstraction of sleep divine many things, for they are divine by nature; and whenever they return to themselves, they realize this divinity.”²² For Ficino, that is to say, the powers of prophetic ecstasy

²¹ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, ed., trans. Jayne, speech 6, ch. 13, p. 230 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1361).

²² Ficino, *Letters*, I, no. 9, p. 22 (*Opera omnia*, I, 616).

and prediction corroborated the Christian-Platonic axiom that the human mind, while temporarily lodged in the perishable body, in essence belongs to an imperishable eternal realm existing above and beyond the body. At the same time, however, Ficino fully acknowledged that the drive to realize one's "divinity" also permits a use of corporeal means in the role of material causes, including, among them, the means of humoral melancholy.

Reaffirming this larger import of the prophetic impulse in his *Theologia Platonica*, conceived as a philosophical demonstration of the soul's immortality, Ficino distinguished seven ways by which souls momentarily "separated from their bodies" are enabled to predict the future with uncanny accuracy. "We free ourselves (*vacamus*)," Ficino maintained, "by means of dreaming, swooning (*syncope*), the melancholy humor, a moderated complexion, solitude, amazement (*admiratione*), and chastity."²³ As indicated by several of these ways of achieving *vacatio animae*, a momentary severance of the soul from its body in the act of a dreamlike prophetic trance does not entail a rejection of material aids. On the contrary, as indicated by the third way in particular, it is furnished with a highly serviceable ministrant in the melancholy humor, notably in its fervid adust form, which, Ficino contended, is endowed with the property, when properly applied, of "withdrawing the soul, by means of a contraction, from external occupations (*contractione animam ab externis negotiis sevocantis*)."²⁴ In this way Ficino effectively merged the melancholic state claimed by the Aristotelian author of the *Problemata*, therein claimed to be the special property of "Sibyls and soothsayers . . . and all that are divinely inspired, when they become such not by illness but by natural temperament,"²⁵ with Plato's concept of the *furor divinus*, of which the *furor mysticus* and *furor propheticus* comprised two basic subdivisions.

The Platonically conditioned notion of prophetic premonition reiterated by Ficino, moreover, bore an implication going beyond the prediction of particular events. For it also pertained to premonitions by various ancient gentile sages, among them the Persian Zoroaster, the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus, and the Greeks Orpheus and

²³ Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, lib. VIII, cap. 2, in *Opera omnia*, I, 292.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁵ Klubansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 24.

Pythagoras before Plato even came on the scene, of such abstract Christian truths as monotheism, the Trinity, creation out of nothing, the eternality of the Word (*Logos*), and the historical appearance of Christ.²⁶ It is not fortuitous, Ficino added, that these same ancient forerunners of Christ, that is, *prisci theologi*, were often prone to fits of melancholy, the effects of which, he maintained, did more to expedite than deter their divinely instilled drive to free themselves from their corporeal shackles.

While Ficino met with little objection among orthodox Christians to his Platonically derived notion of inspired prophecy, the same cannot be said for his appeal to the art of astrology which, again with the *prisci theologi* his guides, he put to the use of prophecy. By steeping themselves in astrological knowledge, Ficino averred, the ancient sages discovered that they were better able to achieve their religious objectives by clarifying the cosmic obstacles impeding their efforts. A secondary consequence of this astrological-religious quest by the ancient theologians, Ficino surmised, was their ability to make accurate unerring predictions about the future.

The challenge to Christian orthodoxy raised by this secondary application of astrology, of course, lay in its implication of fatalism. Ficino's response to this challenge, like that of numerous astrologically astute precursors similarly anxious to maintain compatibility between their beloved art and Christian orthodoxy, was to distinguish between planetary dispositions and absolute free will, the latter integrally linked to the premise of an immortal soul. The stars, Ficino agreed with a popular adage formulated to underscore this compatibility, do not necessitate, but only incline (*astra non necessitant, sed inclinunt*). Or as a variant of this affirmation went: "A wise man holds sway over the stars" (*sapiens homo dominatur astris*).²⁷ Under the

²⁶ On this legacy see esp. D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972), pp. 1-14.

²⁷ If we are to take Pico della Mirandola (see below) at his word, Ficino was among those who encouraged him to take up the pen against the fatalistic implications of astrology. Nevertheless, as Walker has convincingly demonstrated in his *Magic*, p. 54, with both Ficino and Pico included in his rule: "There was for everyone, without exception, a good and bad astrology, just as, for nearly everyone, there was a good and a bad magic." The criterion upon which most observers of the stars settled in their efforts to distinguish between the two types of astrology, according to Walker, p. 55, is the extent to which astrology "safeguarded or infringed human responsibility and divine providence." Cf. Walker, "Ficino and Astrology,"

same guideline Ficino assigned to planetary Saturn, said to rule over the melancholy complexion, a cooperative role in the provocation of human genius, prophetic genius included.

In developing his genial theory Ficino had not only the medical, astrological, and theological traditions to draw on, but also the humanist traditions for which his native Florence had acted as a foremost hub of activity. As earlier noted, the moral virtues comprising the central concern of the earlier Florentine humanists belong to the first stage of what Ficino envisaged as a three-stage purgative ascent to God, the higher stages of which he identified with theological virtues. Much as Ficino can be said to have subordinated Aristotelian naturalist to Platonic supernaturalist concerns in his philosophical hierarchy, so can he be said to have subordinated Ciceronian moral to Platonic supermoral concerns in his mystical hierarchy.

Of the prominent humanist motifs imprinting themselves on Ficino's genial theory, especially influential was that of the dejected and melancholy hero, an image that readily merged with the theme of heroic love, a species of melancholy, filtering to Ficino through the medical traditions. More specifically, Ficino detected a fitting mythical paradigm for melancholy genius in the heroic figure of the suffering Prometheus. "Instructed by the divine wisdom of Pallas," according to Ficino, Prometheus "gained possession of the heavenly fire, that is, reason." But such a sacred acquisition, Ficino further pointed out, proved to be as baneful as it was exhilarating for its possessor, inasmuch as Prometheus, being situated "on the highest peak of the mountain, that is, at the very height of contemplation, is rightly judged most miserable of all, for he is made wretched by the continual gnawing of the most ravenous of vultures, that is, by the torment of inquiry."²⁸

On a personal level Ficino's secular-based interest in this matter was principally dictated by the field of endeavor in which he himself was "heroically" engaged, the study of philosophy. As a wider

in Gian Carlo Garfagnini, *Marsilio Ficino e il Ritorno di Platone: Studi e Documenti*, 2 vols. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1986), II, 341 ff. For further indications of an ambivalent approach to astrology assumed by Ficino and Pico see Thorndike, *Magic*, IV, ch. 61, pp. 529 ff.; Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 108-11, and *Astrology in the Renaissance*, ch 2, pp. 29 ff., and ch. 3, pp. 56 ff.; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 63-64; and Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, pp. 16 ff.

²⁸ Ficino, "Five Questions Concerning the Mind" (*Epist.*, II, no. 1, in *Opera*, I, pp. 675 ff.), in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, p. 208.

reading of philosophy furnished him by his master Plato instructed him, however, turning it to the pursuit of eternal beauty together with eternal truth, the secular applications of his genial theory could also be extended to include the less discursive expressions of poetry and art. For Ficino, that is to say, the psychological complex making possible acute and profound philosophical inquiry was dependent on the same supermundane impetus as made possible the conjuration of beautiful forms in sound and sight. As will now be established, this is a view of genial prowess that would have important implications not only for philosophical theory proper, but also for poetic and art theory in affiliation with philosophy.

* * *

In his *De vita* Ficino addressed himself, like Alberti earlier, to the question of why scholars are inordinately disposed to melancholy. Also like Alberti, Ficino found the characteristic melancholy of scholars to be intrinsically tied to their solitary ways, triggering in them loneliness and anxiety of heart. But Ficino added a crucial element lacking to Alberti's analysis of scholarly melancholy that placed both solitude and the melancholy induced by it in a far better light. In collaboration with the Platonic frenzies, Ficino averred, melancholy, far from imposing pathological encumbrances on the scholar as a philosophically deprived physician might advise us, is able to be philosophically utilized as a material agent for liberating the scholar's mind from worldly encumbrances.

At the same time Ficino recommended that a scholar's detachment from society should not be too sudden, a lesson confirmed for him by his astrological overview. Left alone to its own inborn proclivities unchecked by moderating forces, Ficino admitted, planetary Saturn, together with the melancholy humor governed by its occult effusions, is liable to influence the human being into extremes of behavior that can result in obstructing rather than facilitating the soul's Heaven-bound itinerary. A key to restraining the more extreme influences of Saturn, according to Ficino, most notably that encouraging an ascetic flight into solitude, is planetary Jupiter, symbolizing at once the demands of the natural world and the demands of civil discourse.

The conflicting roles of Saturn and Jupiter in symbolizing the tension between the natural and supernatural requirements of human existence are aptly illustrated by a passage in one of Ficino's letters.

Reminding his correspondent of an earlier discussion of his Platonic circle in which those present had inquired into the bipolar nature of the human soul (appearing, as it does, on the horizon dividing temporal from eternal things), Ficino recalled as one of the conclusions of that meeting that “our Plato placed the higher part of the soul under the authority of Saturn, that is in the realm mind and divine providence, and the lower part under Jupiter, in the realm of life and fate.” Accordingly, noted Ficino, “the soul seems to have a double aspect, one of gold and one of silver,” the former “golden” aspect signifying domination by the saturnine complexion and the latter “silver” one by the jovial complexion.²⁹ The tension symbolized by the opposition of Saturn and Jupiter also lay for Ficino between the contemplative and civic ways of life.

Likewise highlighting a jovial-saturnine opposition is a passage of Ficino’s *De vita* maintaining that “Saturn is an enemy of those who overtly lead a commonplace life, or who, though they flee the company of vulgar people, yet do not lay aside their vulgar thoughts. Thus, resigning common life to Jupiter, he retained the sequestered and divine life for himself.”³⁰ Corresponding to this saturnine influence among the humors, observed Ficino, is natural melancholy “because it is akin to the center of the earth, compels the mind to investigate the centers of particular things, and because it corresponds in the highest degree with the highest planet Saturn, it raises the mind to comprehending the highest things.”³¹ In this divinely mandated capacity, wrote Ficino, “instead of earthly life, from which he is himself cut off, Saturn confers upon you heavenly and eternal life.”³² It is a principal task of philosophy under Saturn’s direction, Ficino determined, to guide the soul’s intellectual journey from mere earthly to “heavenly and eternal life.” As Ficino testified in this regard to one of his correspondents: “Of all the faculties of men none appears closer or more similar to the Godhead than philosophy, and so

²⁹ Ficino, *Letters*, I, no. 107, p. 133 (*Opera omnia*, I, 658). For a similar discussion see Ficino’s “Five Questions Concerning the Mind” (*Epist.*, II, 1, in *Opera omnia*, I(2), 675 ff.), trans. in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 193 ff.

³⁰ Ficino, *De vita*, lib. III, cap. 22, in *Opera omnia*, I(1), 564 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 364–65). Trans. used is by Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 272.

³¹ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 5, in *Opera*, I, 497 (Kaske and Clark, 117). On this passage see also Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 259.

³² *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 15, in *Opera omnia*, I (1), 522 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 212–3). Trans. used is that of Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 273.

nothing available to us, save God himself, is seen as more perfect or more excellent.”³³

For Ficino, then, the study of philosophy was not the dry subject sometimes attributed to the Aristotelian syllogistic procedure of speculation, even though, as previously noted, his systematic writings in this area, of which the *Theologia Platonica* constitutes the prime case in point, methodically resemble those of the great medieval scholastics beholden to that procedure. His prime paradigm was not a stolid Aristotle but a spirited Plato, whose voice appeared to him to have much in common with that of the religious prophets, “so that our Plato seems inspired not by human genius,” as Ficino wrote in one of his letters, “but by a Delphic oracle.”³⁴ Nevertheless, Ficino’s admiration for Plato did not mean that he did not also find something of value, when placed in their proper subordinate position, in the corresponding speculations of Aristotle. One such speculation pertained to the origin of philosophical genius.

At bottom, Ficino was persuaded, philosophy springs from the identical ecstatic and illuminative powers as does the mystical and prophetic instinct. As such it is, as it were, an intellectualized form of revelation. Moreover, as the “love of wisdom” in the literal sense of the word, philosophy bears cognation not only with the inspired states labeled by Plato the mystical and prophetic frenzies, but also with the state which Plato designated the frenzy of love. That the divine frenzy triggers a natural reaction in its human medium was also a fundamental tenet of Ficino, the consequence of which is the philosopher’s proneness for melancholy. “Those are especially pressed down by the black bile,” observed Ficino, “who are given to the assiduous study of philosophy, which has the effect of sundering their minds from their bodies and from corporeal things and attaching them to incorporeal things.”³⁵

Pre-eminently illustrating this truth for Ficino, with Aristotle his claimed authority, were Socrates, “a man undoubtedly melancholy by nature,”³⁶ and his great disciple Plato, of a “melancholy and pro-

³³ Ficino, *Letters*, III, no. 13, p. 20 (*Opera omnia*, I, 758).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, no. 3, p. 9 (*Opera omnia*, I, 723). On Ficino’s scholastic background see above, note 6.

³⁵ Ficino, *De vita*, lib. 1, cap. 4, in *Opera omnia*, I(1), 497 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 114–5). Also cited in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 259 note.

³⁶ Ficino, *De amore*, speech 7, ch. 2, p. 218 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1356).

found disposition.”³⁷ Socrates further corroborated for Ficino a close connection between philosophical and love melancholy, confirmed by the asseveration: “Socrates, whom Aristotle judged melancholy, was, as he himself avowed, more inclined to the art of love than other men.”³⁸ Ficino, accordingly, believed himself to be in good company by admitting that he too was not free of this affliction.

Sometimes Ficino expressed his sense of philosophical alienation in the transcendent terms of Plato, as when he exulted in a letter, “I am now out of my mind, but not mindless, because I am beyond mind.” Associating this alienated state with Plato’s notion of divine frenzy, Ficino continued that “I do not fall to the ground; I am borne upward. Now I expand in every direction and overflow but am not dispersed, because God, the unity of unities, brings me to myself, because he makes me live with himself.”³⁹ Other times, however, Ficino chose to express his alienation in the more down-to-earth, natural terms of Aristotle. “Saturn,” he conceded on a personal note, “seems to have impressed the seal of melancholy on me from the beginning.” But the example of his revered Plato had shown Ficino that this is not a condition to be ashamed of. On the contrary he could register his agreement with Aristotle, who had counted his teacher Plato among the great melancholics, that “this nature itself is a unique and divine gift.”⁴⁰

Ficino’s most extensively formulated contribution to the subject of melancholy genius, accordingly, his *De vita*, is geared chiefly to the philosophical profession of which he demonstrated himself to be an illustrious Renaissance member. As such it served to justify his own melancholic proclivities, which he preferred to construe as “heroic” in the positive sense suggested by Aristotle in the *Problemata* rather than in the negative sense suggested by the writings of the physicians. This revalued interpretation of melancholic heroicism, as his *De amore* reconfirmed, also extended to the particular species of melancholy termed heroic love by the physicians, now to be viewed as the physiological counterpart of Plato’s love frenzy.

The ancient physicians, observed Ficino in this regard, “said that love was a kind of melancholy humor and passion of melancholy,”

³⁷ Ficino, *Letters*, III, no. 19, p. 37 (*Opera omnia*, I, 765).

³⁸ Ficino, *De amore*, speech 6, ch. 9, p. 196 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1347).

³⁹ Ficino, *Letters*, I, no. 4, p. 11 (*Opera omnia*, I, 611).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II, no. 24, pp. 33–34 (*Opera omnia*, I, 752–53).

the result being that “not only does love render men melancholy, but anyone who is naturally of that temperament is more susceptible to love.”⁴¹ It only remained for Ficino to extend the notion of heroic love from the lovers of physical objects to the lovers of spiritual objects—that is, to the philosophers, symbolized in the image of the suffering hero Prometheus. Just as poets often succumb to madness, “albeit divine,” as Plato proclaimed, so are philosophers as Aristotle proclaimed. For as noted by the pseudonymous author of the *Problemata*, “Philosophers also have their own way of going mad.”⁴²

If Ficino can thus be said to have explained one of the key components comprising his concept *vacatio animae*, melancholy, by the same token he appears to have contradicted another key component of that concept, a moderated complexion. He did not remain oblivious to this apparent contradiction, answering it in the following way. The philosopher, pleaded Ficino, must find a middle way, like Odysseus, between two monsters threatening his sanity. The first monster, the Scylla of phlegmatic sloth, “often blunts and suffocates the genius,” whereas the second monster, the Charybdis of melancholy, while displaying certain enervative features in common with cold and moist phlegm, displays others as prone to overstimulating as oppressing a scholar’s mind. The key to this dual potential of melancholy, he determined with help from the *Problemata*, lay in its inherently combustible nature.

When melancholy “excessively abounds or glows,” Ficino echoed this Aristotelian theme, “it vexes the brain with assiduous trouble and deliriousness, and perturbs the judgment of the soul,” whereas, when moderately effervescing, it is capable of raising the mind to states of unexcelled profundity and clarity of thought.⁴³ According to Ficino, that is to say, melancholy, while able to threaten the philosophical scholar with detrimental extremes as depicted in the Homeric image of the two monsters, is also able, when moderately enkindled, to offer a middle way between their menacing tentacles. Put another way, Ficino reasoned, philosophical melancholy, when its inflammation is carefully controlled and tempered, is able to act as a fitting natural auxiliary of Plato’s divine frenzies.

⁴¹ Ficino, *De amore*, speech 6, ch. 9, p. 195 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1346).

⁴² Ficino, *Letters*, II, no. 16, p. 23 (*Opera omnia*, I, 729).

⁴³ Ficino, *De vita*, lib. I, cap. 3, in *Opera omnia*, I, 496 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 112–13).

As we would expect, Ficino's sanction of melancholy as an aid to philosophical genius also entailed a corresponding sanction of solitary seclusion in which melancholy is said to be optimally cultivated, a linkage explicitly pointed out in the *De vita*. Whereas philosophers "are deprived of occupation in their bodies," reported Ficino therein, "conversely, they are occupied in their brains and minds."⁴⁴ Ficino designated three main causes for this extraordinary mental activity of philosophers, located respectively in the celestial, natural, and human spheres.

By the first of these causes, the *causa coelestis*, according to Ficino, certain planets, most notably Mercury and Saturn, are held to impinge on the function of human cerebration by occultly agitating the bodily humors. In particular, through the effect of Mercury "we are summoned to investigate in learned matters," and through the effect of Saturn "we persevere in the investigation of these learned questions, and guard over those things which we have discovered." As for the second cause, the *causa naturalis*: "If especially difficult sciences are to be pursued, it is necessary for the soul to withdraw from externals to internals, just as from the circumference of a circle to its center, and while it speculates within itself (so I say), to remain very stable within the center of the man."⁴⁵ Finally, regarding the third main cause of philosophical melancholy, the *causa humana*, the lover of truth often removes himself from the mitigating influences of social intercourse to ponder his deep questions and to experience his resulting anxieties of heart. Accordingly, declared Ficino with his own personal experience to lend his genial theory a sense of painful immediacy, "most of all are those scholars pressed down by black bile who are given to the assiduous study of philosophy, which has the effect of cutting off the mind from the body and from corporeal things."⁴⁶

If the art taken up most directly with the *causa coelestis* in this triadic list of causes, astrology, helped to validate Ficino's concept of philosophical genius in one respect, it also presented him with a problem of consistency. "Love," Ficino declared in his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, "is justly called by Agathon a God, Diotima a daemon, and by me a Venerian daemon."⁴⁷ In more detailed explanation of this "Venerian" basis of love Ficino resurrected an account

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 4, p. 496 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 112-13).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 496-7 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 114-15).

⁴⁷ Ficino, *De amore*, speech 6, ch. 4, p. 187 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1343).

of seven planetary gifts formulated in ancient times by Macrobius, conceived under the presumption that demonic agents are empowered to act as mediators between the planets and men. According to this Macrobian scheme, as restated by Ficino, "Venus inspires love through Venerian daemons," whereas, correspondingly, "Saturn strengthens our power of observation through the Saturnian daemons."⁴⁸ How then, we ask, did Ficino make transition from a Venerian-driven melancholic lover to a Saturnian-driven "lover of divine wisdom?"

We must conclude from Ficino's "Macrobian" restatement of the planetary gifts that the Venerian demon, presumed to impact primarily on the sanguine humor, does not of itself explain the conversion of worldly lovers into philosophical lovers of wisdom. For this process to be successfully effected there is need of a conjunction of Venus and Saturn which, through the mediation of the corresponding "demons", produces two opposing forces in the human recipient. The result of the first demonic force, the Saturnian, is to instill a sober clarity of intellectual vision in the philosopher, whereas the result of the second demonic force, the Venerian, is to infuse the philosopher with the ecstatic power of love, a "magical" power in Ficino's eyes, which inflames the will to rise to God in tandem with the intellect. The physiological response to this joint voluntaristic-intellectual elevation of the philosophical soul is the inflammation of the melancholy humor by the natural heat of the blood.

Much as the mystical, prophetic, and love frenzies served Ficino as points of intersection with philosophy, so did the poetic frenzy serve him in the same stead. As Ficino put his unified vision of poetic creativity and philosophical query in no uncertain terms to a correspondent: "All antiquity, indeed, teaches us to combine poetry with philosophy."⁴⁹ And wherever the divine frenzy went for Ficino, in this as in his other lines of query, the theme of melancholy genius was sure to follow.

For Ficino, with Plato and pseudo-Aristotle his guides, poetic and philosophical genius were functionally distinguishable but substan-

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* For original source of this concept see Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis*, lib. I, cap. 12 (see above, p. 20n). Passage repr. in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 155n.

⁴⁹ Ficino, *Letters*, II, no. 3, p. 10 (*Opera omnia*, I, 724). The addressee is Bartolomeo della Fonte (d. 1513).

tially unified through, on one hand, a shared cause of divine inspiration and illumination, and, on the other hand, a shared effect of melancholy alienation. If the poetic theology of forerunners like Boccaccio and Salutati can be said to have acted as a kind of bridge to Ficino's Platonic theology, conversely, Ficino's Platonic theology can be said to have retraversed that bridge from theologized philosophy to theologized poetry. In the process, as we will now observe more closely, Ficino also prepared the way to theologizing the visual arts in underlying association with poetry, a Platonized restatement of the old saying that the art of painting is silent poetry, and poetry, speaking and singing painting.

* * *

That Ficino was aware of the highly uncomplimentary picture of poetry presented by Plato in the *Republic* is revealed in several of his letters, the import of which is to uphold the existence two kinds of verse-making, wicked and good, with only the former banished from the ideal state. As to what more precisely were the telltale marks of wicked poetry for Plato, Ficino singled out two principal traits, the first consisting of its tendency to anthropomorphize the gods, and the second, of the claim that the verses of the poets are forged through their own arduous effort and skills of literary technique, unassisted by a higher placed creative spirit.

Concerning the first of these traits, anthropomorphism, Ficino apprised one of his correspondents that poets like Homer and Hesiod were justly repudiated by Plato, not because of an intrinsic defect of poetry itself, but because, in their impiety, "they improperly ascribed divine qualities to men and . . . impiously ascribed human qualities to the gods." And concerning the second trait, excessive emphasis on human-based inventive techniques, Ficino assured the same correspondent that, in accord with what Plato taught in his *Ion* and a range of Greek, Hebraic, and even Persian poets inspired by the divine frenzy confirm, "you owe your poetry not so much to your diligence . . . as to the inspiration of the Muses."⁵⁰ To another

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* I, no. 130, p. 170 (*Opera omnia*, I, 673). Ficino's commentary and trans. of Plato's *Ion* are found in his *Opera omnia*, II, 1281 ff. Cf. his commentary to Plato's *Phaedrus*, in *Opera omnia*, II, 1363 ff. For Ficino's poetic theory see Concetta Carestia Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250-1500* (Lewisburg: Buckness Univ. Press, 1981), ch. 13, pp. 230 ff.

correspondent Ficino clarified his inspiration theory by pointing out that the Muses are not the true causes of the poetic impulse, but rather mediating conduits, so to speak, of a poetic frenzy originating in Heaven. As Ficino preferred to put this notion in the language of the ancient gentile theologians: "Therefore poetry springs from divine frenzy, frenzy from the Muses, and the Muses from Jove."⁵¹

Significantly for our purposes, moreover, Ficino found crucial corroboration for Plato's doctrine of poetic frenzy in Aristotle. For as the pseudonymous author of the *Problemata* had informed Ficino, included with the great heroes and philosophers in illustration of the marvelous powers of the melancholy humor are "most of the poets."⁵² Making patent this aesthetic extension of the Aristotelian genial theory by Ficino is a key section of his *De vita* espousing the virtues of melancholy in what he thought of as a poet-priest.

Plato insightfully proclaimed in his *Phaedrus*, noted Ficino, that "the gates of poetry are knocked upon in vain without frenzy." But such poetic frenzy, Ficino was likewise persuaded from an Aristotelian standpoint, is also translatable into the humoral terms of the physicians. "That the priests of the Muses are melancholics, being so either from the beginning or becoming so by study," Ficino averred, "has been sufficiently demonstrated, first by celestial reasons, secondly by natural ones, and thirdly by human ones."⁵³ In this way Ficino endowed melancholy with advantages for the prompting of imaginative poetic expression paralleling those he recognized for the prompting of philosophical abstraction, with their genial differences viewed as but variant modes of expression of what at bottom is a shared impulse both originating in, and desirous of returning to, the infinitely removed divine realm.

For Ficino, moreover, as for Alberti before him, musical and poetic creativity was translatable into visual expression—that is, the auditorily harmonious concordances of the musicians and poets into the symmetrical concordances of the painters, sculptors, and architects. Also for Ficino as for Alberti, the pre-eminent exemplar in illustration of this translation was the Divine Creator, whose supreme poetic

⁵¹ *Ibid.* I, no. 52, p. 70 (*Opera omnia*, I, 635).

⁵² Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 19.

⁵³ Ficino, *De vita*, lib. I, cap. 5, in *Opera*, I, 497 (Kaske and Clark, pp. 116–17).

powers are visually as well as audially apprehended. As he made this point in a letter, earlier cited, counseling the union of poetry and philosophy: "We are taught the same thing by the Divinity itself which, rejoicing everywhere in poetic form, adorned the heavens with innumerable lights, as flowers in a meadow, and ordered the diverse orbits of the spheres so that, in perfect concert, they make a marvelous harmony and melody."⁵⁴

The power of divine love, Ficino deduced from speculations like this, is endowed not only with the ability to illuminate divinely instituted truth as a requisite of philosophical genius, but also with the ability to illuminate divinely fashioned forms as a requisite of poetic and artistic genius. As Ficino advised a correspondent in this regard: "The right end of loving is union, which consists in these three: thinking, seeing and hearing."⁵⁵ While generally displaying a certain ambivalence as to whether seeing or hearing occupied the superior status in support of the philosophical endeavor, Ficino revealed his intent here to be, not of subordinating one to the other, but rather of underscoring their underlying kinship and interdependency. If, Ficino observed, such aspiring love on the part of poets, artists, and philosophers also often results in melancholy, corresponding to what the physicians call heroic love, this can be considered as the worthwhile price they are compelled to pay for two shared features: a strong attraction to solitude, and an overweening desire to achieve amorous union with God.

In this regard Alberti's earlier reported invocation of Hermes Trismegistus as his ancient authority that "sculpture and painting arose with religion"⁵⁶ can be viewed as pre-empting a basic theme of Ficino, who applied the occultist principles of Hermeticism to the entire spectrum of disciplines embraced by Plato's theory of divine frenzy, the disciplines of architecture, painting, and sculpture included. After Ficino the thesis would become common currency among the artists of Italy that poetic melancholy—the natural auxiliary to Plato's poetic frenzy—pertains as fully to visual as to literary expression. Or

⁵⁴ Ficino, *Letters*, II, no. 3, p. 10 (*Opera omnia*, I, 724).

⁵⁵ Ficino, *Letters*, I, no. 47, p. 63 (*Opera omnia*, I, 630). The addressee is Giovanni Calvacanti.

⁵⁶ For the Albertian ref. see above, p. 63.

putting the same notion in its astrologically equivalent form, visual artists along with philosophers and poets could convincingly claim to be “born under Saturn.”⁵⁷

The philosophical ascent to God, as conceived by Ficino, is charted in two main stages, with the first stage moving from matter to form, and the second stage, moving from forms subsisting in the world to the transcendent form of God. Concerning the first of these stages Ficino reminded his friend Giovanni Calvacanti that “love (as all philosophers define it) is the longing for beauty,” adding that, lest such beauty be mistaken for a mere material trait, “the beauty of the body lies not in the shadow of matter, but in the light and grace of form; not in dark mass, but in clear proportion; not in sluggish and senseless weight, but in harmonious number and measure.”⁵⁸ And concerning the second stage, Ficino revealed that, by inciting the soul from lower to higher forms of beauty, “God draws the desire of the mind to Himself by filling it with beauty.”⁵⁹ For this reason, proclaimed Ficino, “creation is so ordered that there is no true love that is not religious, nor is there any true religion but that sustained by love.”⁶⁰ Plato, Ficino reminded his readers, termed such love a divine frenzy which, in its specialized expression as the frenzy of love, “he defines as the desire to return again to the contemplation of divine beauty.”⁶¹ Aristotle, on the other hand, alternatively conveying the naturalist diagnosis of love frenzy as presented by the physicians, referred to the identical condition as melancholy.

Such heaven-bound love, according to Ficino, distinguishing it from the finite kind of aspiration expressed by worldly lovers, aspires

⁵⁷ For Ficino’s general influence on Renaissance art see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, pp. 20–22; Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations*, pp. 182 ff.; Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York: Norton, 1958, rev. 1969), passim; and André Chastel, *Art et Humanisme à Florence au Temps de Laurent le Magnifique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), passim. On the vogue of the melancholy artist prompted by Ficino see Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn. . . .* (New York: Random House, 1963), esp. ch. 5: “Genius, Madness, and Melancholy,” pp. 98 ff.

⁵⁸ Ficino, *Letters*, I, no. 47, p. 63 (*Opera omnia*, I, 630). For full-scale expositions of the metaphor of light among Ficino’s writings see his *Orphica comparatio solis ad Deum*, *Liber de sole*, and *Liber de lumine*, in *Opera omnia*, I, pp. 825 ff., 965 ff., and 976 ff., and Walker’s treatment of this metaphor, *Magic*, p. 18 and note. A trans. of the *De sole* can be found in Arturo B. Fallico and Herman Shapiro, eds. *Renaissance Philosophy: The Italian Philosophers* (New York: Modern Library, 1967), pp. 118 ff.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I, no. 39, p. 53 (*Opera omnia*, I, 627).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, I, no. 48, p. 64 (*Opera omnia*, I, 632).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I, no. 7, p. 16 (*Opera omnia*, I, 613).

to the infinitely divine. "Wherefore, I ask you, Socrates," Diotima's counsel to Plato's master was paraphrased by Ficino, "to esteem other things with a definite limit and restriction; but you must worship God truly with infinite love, and let there be no limit to divine love."⁶² It is of the very nature of such infinite love, Ficino contended, to resist being contained by the lover, who is thereby motivated to share the beautiful object of his love with others. Among those most notably illustrating this effect of love on their behavior are the philosophers and poets, who, with pen in hand, testify that "this love stimulates the soul that has reached maturity with a powerful desire for teaching and writing."⁶³ There is also implied in Ficino's view of love's genial effects, however, that those more adept with a paintbrush or chisel than a pen are also able to express love's magical powers. In both forms of expression, literary and visual, the goal was held by Ficino to be one of leaving to posterity testimony to the eternal truths illuminated by love's rays.

The initial impact of Plato on the Italian Renaissance, as we might expect in light of Ficino's key part in its success, was one establishing considerable tolerance toward Aristotle.⁶⁴ It was only later in the century, after the pressures of events such as the foreign invasions of Italy and the religious reform movements had made the principle of compromise in general less tenable, that the compromise between Plato and Aristotle forged by Ficino also tended to break down into its component parts. In subsequent chapters we will examine the breakdown of this supernaturalist-naturalist compromise. First, however, we have yet to demonstrate a persistent philosophical endeavor, extending first to Ficino's Florentine circle and then beyond Florence to the whole of Italy, to preserve its integrity. The theory of melancholy genius, as we will now observe, found resonance in Ficino's own Florence before its spread into the rest of Italy and into Europe as a whole.

⁶² Ficino, *De amore*, speech 6, ch. 18, p. 215 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1355).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ch. 11, p. 204 (*Opera omnia*, II, 1350).

⁶⁴ On the campaign to reconcile Plato and Aristotle in the sixteenth century see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 128–133, and Carlo Colombero, ed. *Uomo e Natura nella Filosofia del Rinascimento* (Torino: Loescher, 1976), pp. 155–59.

B. *The Genial Theory of Ficino's Florentine Circle*

Among those caught up in Ficino's ambitious philosophical effort to renovate Plato at Florence, we can choose a no more fitting starting point than his courtly patron Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492), whose earlier immersion in the traditions of stilnovism found in Ficino's *De amore* a convenient philosophical justification.⁶⁵ Lorenzo, however, with celebrated love-struck sufferers like Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio to draw on for literary sustenance, began his amatory journey at the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum from Ficino. For whereas Ficino started with an abstract theory of love elicited from Plato's *Symposium* and revised it, with "Aristotelian" help, to rationalize the personal sufferings of particular melancholy lovers, Lorenzo started with a jointly poetic-prose record of his own personal suffering and furnished it with backing from Ficino's abstract philosophical rendering of love. The poetic image presented by Lorenzo that, more than any other, encapsulates his blending of stilnovist with Ficinian elements is of himself in the pose of a melancholy lover.

"I often sit on a hard stone," as he depicted this pose in one of his sonnets, "lean my cheek against my hand, and think to myself and meditate, step by step, upon my amorous pilgrimage."⁶⁶ The association of this meditative pose with humoral melancholy is made

⁶⁵ The references here employed are based on Gigi Cavalli, ed. *Tutte le Opere*, Vol. II: *Scritti d'Amore*, ed. (Milan: Rizzoli, 1958). A group of Lorenzo's sonnets, with prose commentaries, have recently appeared in English translation under the title *The Autobiography of Lorenzo de' Medici: A Commentary on My Sonnets*, ed., trans. James Wyatt Cook (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), the corresponding references of which will be placed in parentheses. According to the sequence worked out by Cook and presented in his introduction, pp. 1–23, after receiving a copy of Ficino's *De amore* five years after assuming the head of the Medici patriarchy, in 1474, Lorenzo put a commentary on his sonnets, hitherto conceived along largely conventional stilnovist lines, through a series of modifications that, culminating in a 1490–1491 version, more patently reflected the Platonic frenzy theory popularized by Ficino. This view contrasts with older ones placing greater emphasis on the stilnovist background of Lorenzo, among which can be counted Nesca A. Robb, *Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935), and Angelo Lipari, *The Dolce Stil Novo according to Lorenzo de' Medici*. . . (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1936). On Lorenzo's patronage of Ficino's Platonic program see Della Torre, *Accademia Platonica*, pp. 585 ff.

⁶⁶ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Rime*, no. 114, in *Scritti d'Amore*, p. 88. On this lyric see André Chastel, "Melancholia in the Sonnets of Lorenzo de' Medici," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VIII (1945), 61–7 (at 61).

explicit by Lorenzo in a commentary to a sonnet that acknowledges: "Being that every robust (*forte*) love springs from a robust imagination, lovers are by nature melancholics. I confess to being one of these, since I have loved with a very great fervency."⁶⁷ The melancholy often visiting Lorenzo while he was immersed in his amorous meditations is explained in a commentary to another sonnet stating that "it is commonly the nature of lovers, and food for their amorous appetites, to indulge in sad and melancholy thoughts, full of tears and sighs. And this is commonly in the very midst of their joy and sweetness."⁶⁸

Being versed in the medical writers, Lorenzo had a convincing explanation for this psychological resultant of his solitary passion. "Love, which strives after a single object and is constant," he noted, "issues from a strong imagination." And such an overweening imagination, he further insisted, "can hardly come about unless the melancholy humor predominates in the lover, whose nature is always to be suspicious and to convert every event, whether prosperous or perverse, into pain and passion."⁶⁹ The intensity of Lorenzo's melancholy sufferings increased as day turned into night, the cause being that he was less diverted by outside distractions from the unceasing activity of his mind.⁷⁰ Even eventual sleep gave him no real respite since his melancholy sorrows simply shifted from his waking world into the world of his dreams.⁷¹

On the heels of this medically derived exegesis of his melancholy, Lorenzo indicated a series of remedial responses. One such response, Lorenzo observed, was to seek solace for his distress "in the business and storminess of civic occupations." Finding that this did not work to his satisfaction, however, he escaped into solitude, which, he found, only exacerbated his pain. "And thus," he reported, "unable either by one or another mode to elevate myself above such grief and bitterness, there remained for me no other remedy and hope than that of death."⁷² But inasmuch as his condition did not permit

⁶⁷ Lorenzo, *Commento*, no. 32, p. 210 (Cook, pp. 222-23).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 3, p. 122 (Cook, pp. 67-69). On this commentary see, in addition to Cook's trans., Lipari, *Lorenzo*, pp. 305 ff.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 19, pp. 171-72 (Cook, pp. 154-57).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, no. 20, p. 176 (Cook, pp. 164-65).

⁷² *Ibid.*, no. 4, p. 125 (Cook, pp. 72-73).

suicide, since that would have meant an end of his amatory yearnings, the only alternative remaining was to resign himself to his melancholy vexations without a further hope of relief. As Lorenzo explained this necessity: "It is the nature of melancholics, as we have called lovers, to seek no other remedy in their suffering than the accumulation of more suffering, and to hold in hatred, and flee from, every type of refreshment and consolation."⁷³

So far Lorenzo's affliction appears to be wholly explicable through the conventional medical diagnosis of love melancholy, a disease to which, the physicians admitted, heroes and other extraordinary types are eminently prone, but a disease all the same. Lorenzo's self-diagnosis and the diagnosis of the physicians share such basic premises as that love melancholy ensues from a deprivation of intimate proximity to one's beloved;⁷⁴ that the resulting excessive imagination of the lover corrupts his senses;⁷⁵ and that, as humoral correlates, sanguine joy dilates the vital spirits of the body whereas melancholy sorrow depresses them.⁷⁶ Further considerations of the lovelorn Lorenzo, however, imply a conception of his affliction that refers it to higher causes than those indicated by a strictly medical analysis. Some of these can be accounted for by traditional stilnovist topoi, whereas others more directly point to the influence of Ficino's *De amore*, a principal object of which is to associate love melancholy, the alienation par excellence of heroic minds, with Plato's *furor amatorius*.

Of Lorenzo's claims on behalf of love that can still be largely relegated to conventional stilnovism, one is that the object of love is supremely realized in a female figure (*la donna*)—who, we are told, serves as the center and foundation of the lover's thoughts just as the earth serves as the center and foundation of the universe;⁷⁷ another, that love, defined as "an appetite for beauty" (*appetito dei bellezza*), enobles the lover and induces him to perform good deeds;⁷⁸ another, that true love begins and ends with death;⁷⁹ another, that love's joys are inseparable from its sorrows;⁸⁰ another, that the eyes

⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 3, p. 122 (Cook, pp. 68–69).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 16, p. 163 (Cook, pp. 140–41).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 164–65 (Cook, pp. 142–43).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 9, p. 142 (Cook, pp. 102–103).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 26, p. 196 (Cook, pp. 198–99).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, proem., p. 105; no. 12, p. 149 (Cook, pp. 34–35; 112–15).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, proem., p. 116; no. 40, pp. 234–35 (Cook, pp. 56–57; 264–67).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 22, p. 181 (Cook, pp. 172–75).

of the lover act as a mirror of his beloved;⁸¹ and still another, that the ennobling powers of love are best cultivated in a state of solitude.⁸² To these traits of love as brought out by Lorenzo, however, are others that, in emphasis if not in kind, underscore a distinctly Ficinian imprint on their author's amorous musings.

The beauty to which the lover aspires, Lorenzo emphasized in reverberation of Ficino's *De amore*, belongs, not to this finite realm, but to an infinite one, the ultimate repository being God Himself; as put by Lorenzo: "Every noble heart lives through infinite beauty" (*ogni gentile cuore viva d'infinita bellezza*).⁸³ And if the object of desire is infinitely removed, Lorenzo further echoed Ficino, it follows that the desire of the lover in pursuit of such beauty must also be infinite; short of reaching that goal, Lorenzo insisted, love is insatiably restless.⁸⁴ Another Ficinian theme adopted by Lorenzo, the crux of Ficino's doctrine of the *magia amoris*, highlights the miraculous powers residing in love;⁸⁵ another, the hierarchical nature of love, proceeding, as though on a ladder (*scala d'amore*), from particular loves to a transcendent universal love;⁸⁶ another, the rarity of perfect love;⁸⁷ another, loves theological validation of immortality and freedom of the will;⁸⁸ and still another, the initiation of the amatory ascent by knowledge.⁸⁹ Through considerations like these Lorenzo, taking the lead of his mentor Ficino, effectively transformed his love melancholy from an infirm alienation curable according to the regimens of the physicians to a divinely instigated alienation encouraged and nurtured in keeping with the precepts of the Platonic philosophers. By so doing, he brought the theme of love to bear, by implication if not by explication, on such genial functions as profound philosophical inquiry and the fabrication of beautiful poems and artistic images.

In their loftiest forms, Lorenzo agreed with Plato, truth, beauty, and goodness are interchangeable,⁹⁰ the inference being that metaphysical and moral philosophy, poetry, and art ultimately aspire to

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, no. 17, p. 168 (Cook, pp. 148-49).

⁸² *Ibid.*, nos. 21, 39, pp. 179-80, 231 (Cook, pp. 170-71, 260-61).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, proem., p. 106; no. 38, p. 228 (Cook, pp. 36-37, 254-55).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, nos. 22, 40, pp. 185, 234 (Cook, pp. 178-79; 264-65).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 23, pp. 185-86 (Cook, pp. 180-83).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 13, p. 154 (Cook, pp. 124-25).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, proem., p. 106 (Cook, pp. 36-37).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 36, p. 224 (Cook, pp. 246-47).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 12, 16, pp. 151, 165 (Cook, pp. 118-19; 144-45).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 38, p. 228 (Cook, pp. 254-55).

the same goals. At the human level where love is expressible in variant modalities, however, Lorenzo employed imagery reflecting the various facets of the scholarly and artistic climate culturally enlivening his native Florence. One moment Lorenzo imagined love as entering the mind through solitary philosophical contemplation, a property, he insisted, of but a rare few;⁹¹ another moment he pictured love as working its marvelous powers through harmonious sound, the special province of poets and musicians;⁹² another moment he presented love as painting a portrait or sculpting an image of the beloved on the lover's heart;⁹³ and another moment he likened love's effect on the lover to that of a fiery furnace like that employed by the alchemists.⁹⁴ The latter image of love's features in particular was crucial to Lorenzo's effort to liberate his melancholy from the depressing doldrums it had in common with phlegm, another of his foremost nighttime visitors.

Further attuned to the "miraculous" powers of love in the sense provided by Ficino was his young polylinguist friend Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), whose Hebraic erudition furnished them with a further dimension—this by inviting the angel magic of Cabala into Ficino's blend of Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic principles. In a commentary on a sonnet addressed to the theme of love by Girolamo Benivieni (1453–1542), Pico characterized the "way of love" (*la via amatoria*), leading from corporeal to intellectual beauty, as a series of fiery purgative stages, the end goal of which is to transmute earthly into eternal life. More particularly, affirmed Pico, love is invested with a miraculous power to transmute the soul purged of its contaminations "into the form of an angel."⁹⁵ Though apparently reticent, as Ficino was not in the same regard, to call on the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius to reinforce his amorous vision, preferring to invoke the Platonic frenzy doctrine independently of a physiological explanation, Pico nevertheless gave indirect

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, proem., p. 104 (Cook, pp. 32–33).

⁹² *Ibid.*, nos. 8, 33, pp. 139, 214 (Cook, pp. 96–97, 230–31).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, nos. 15, 35, pp. 161, 240–41 (Cook, pp. 136–39, 240–41).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 19, p. 174 (Cook, pp. 160–61).

⁹⁵ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Commento sopra una canzona de amore, co[m]posta da Girolamo Benivieni Cittadino Fiorentino, secondo la mente & opinione de' Platonici*, cap. 12, in *Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1557; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969), I, 902. Trans. by Edmund G. Gardner as *A Platonic Discourse Upon Love* (Boston: Merrymount Press, 1914).

support to the Ficinian genial theory through the astrological association of melancholy with the occult effusions of planetary Saturn.

"Who would not wish to be inflamed with those Socratic frenzies sung by Plato in the *Phaedrus*," exulted Pico in the famed oration celebrating human dignity intended to introduce his *Nine-Hundred Theses*, "that . . . he might be borne on the fastest of courses to the heavenly Jerusalem?" Or still more pointedly putting philosophy in common cause with mystical rapture: "Let us be driven, Fathers, let us be driven by the frenzies of Socrates, that they may so throw us into ecstasy as to put our mind and ourselves in God!"⁹⁶ Further revealing an underlying core of agreement between Pico and Ficino was Pico's identification of the marvel-working powers of divine frenzy with those of the magus, who, he revealed, "brings forth into the open the miracles concealed in the recesses of the world, in the depths of nature, and in the storehouses and mysteries of God, just as if she herself were their maker." Sharply distinguishing such divinely instilled magical powers from their demonically instilled look-alikes, Pico wrote in anticipation of the theses prefaced by these words: "I have also proposed theorems dealing with magic, in which I have indicated that magic has two forms, one of which depends entirely on the work and authority of demons, a thing to be abhorred, so help me God and a monstrous thing. The other, when it is rightly pursued, is nothing else than the utter perfection of natural philosophy."⁹⁷ Only missing here is the key role assigned by Ficino to corresponding marvel-working powers residing in the melancholy humor, the reputed physiological counterpart to the divine frenzies. But if reference to the genial humor is lacking in Pico, the same cannot be said for the saturnine planet said to rule over the melancholy complexion.

⁹⁶ Pico, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in Cassirer et al., eds. *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, no. 15, pp. 233–34 (*Opera omnia*, I, 319). On Pico see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 101 ff., summarizing his earlier study *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola; Vita e Dottrina* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1937); Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers*, pp. 54 ff.; and Garin, *Cultura Filosofica*, pp. 229 ff. A valuable new addition to Pico scholarship has been furnished by S.A. Farmer under the title *Pico's 900 Theses (1486): Syncretism in the West* (Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998), the edited and translated text of which is accompanied by an extensive introduction and commentary.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 33, p. 249; no. 32, pp. 246–47. On Pico's demonology see Thorndike, *History of Magic*, IV, 494–95, and Walker, *Magic*, pp. 54 ff.

As previously indicated, the philosophical lover of a higher wisdom and beauty represented for Ficino a product of the tense astrological opposition between, on one side, Saturn and Jupiter, and on the other side, Saturn and Venus. The same can be said for Pico, whose celebrated strictures against astrological fatalism no more discounted for him the possibility of celestial influence on human behavior than it did for Ficino, in which regard Pico conceived of the planets both as substantive influences on human behavior and as literary symbols of the behavior induced. Concerning, in particular, the tense relationship between civic-inducing Jupiter and solitude-inducing Saturn, Pico wrote: "Saturn is a symbol (*è significativo*) of the intellectual nature, which passes its time alone and is addressed to understanding and contemplation, whereas Jupiter is a symbol of the active life, which consists in the rule, administration, and advancement by its authority of those things which are subject to it and inferior."⁹⁸ In the spirit of scholastic synthesis, Pico agreed with Ficino that the two ways of life induced by Saturn and Jupiter are ideally maintained in a state of balanced, if tense, equilibrium. But if a choice had to be made between saturnine reclusiveness and jovial congeniality, Pico also concurred with Ficino that the latter is markedly inferior to the former.

In two respects, however, Pico also displayed key differences with Ficino, both springing out of his disposition to focus more on the higher than the lower stages of the purgative journey of the soul to God. In the first respect, with the language of Hebrew at his disposal in addition to Greek, Pico gave the Jewish Cabala a more central position in his magical rendition of the Platonic frenzy theory than did Ficino. "No magical operation demonstrates greater efficacy," declared Pico in one of his magical *conclusiones*, "than that whose effect issues out of either to explicit or implicit Cabala."⁹⁹ And in

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 8, p. 899. See reference to this citation in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 272n.

⁹⁹ Pico, *Conclusiones*, no. 15, in *Opera omnia*, I, 105: "Nulla potest esse operatio Magica alicuius efficaciae, nisi annexum habeat opus Cabalae explicitum uel implicitum." Cf. *Oration*, in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 251–52. For briefer treatments of this distinctive feature of Pico's thought see Thorndike, *Magic*, IV, 487–88, 494 ff., and Yates, *Bruno*, pp. 91 ff., and *Occult Philosophy*, pp. 18 ff. For full-scale studies of this subject see Joseph Leon Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964); and Philip Beitchman, *Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). For the Jewish mystical tradition lying behind this Christian one see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974; repr., New York: Meridian/Penguin, 1978).

the second respect Pico did not so readily translate the purgative afflictions of the soul induced by divine frenzy into the medically derived term melancholy.

Nevertheless, while distinguishing himself from Ficino in his reluctance to make an explicit connection between Plato's divine frenzy theory and Aristotle's theory of genial melancholy, Pico made such a connection at least implicit in his astrological references. For like melancholy with which it is commonly associated, Pico characterized Saturn in his disputation on astrology, the planet whose genius-inducing effusions are presumed to coalesce with those of Venus so as to spur love to a higher philosophical level, as ambivalent in its nature. On one hand, he noted, Saturn induces torpidity, and further prompts the mind to become "deceitful, impure, rude, superstitious, and full of fancies on the verge of madness," whereas, on the other hand, Saturn instills the mind with an inclination toward "profundity of counsel, the investigation of abstruse matters, and the love of contemplation (*amorem contemplationis*)."¹⁰⁰ Lurking behind this astrologically based observation, by innuendo if not by express statement, lay the revaluation given to melancholy under Saturn's governance by Ficino.

Likewise locating the Platonic frenzy doctrine at the center of his philosophical speculations was Christoforo Landino (1424–1504), who identified what was originally put forth by Plato as one of four branches of divine frenzy, the frenzy of love, with its trunk. As he made this point in his allegorical interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Now the divine frenzy was called love by Plato, and love is defined as the love of corporeal beauty attempting to return once again to the contemplation of divine beauty."¹⁰¹ The amorous "return" to a life of contemplation here indicated reflects Landino's inheritance from Plotinus and Macrobius, through Ficino's mediation, of a three-stage purgative scheme moving the soul from lower civic to higher theological virtues in validation of the soul's immortality.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Pico, *In astrologiam disputationum*, lib. IV, cap. 9, in *Opera omnia*, I, 538.

¹⁰¹ Landino, *Virgilius cum commentariis quinque*. . . (Venice: Jacobus Zachon, 1499), lib. VI, fol. 219^r. For Landino's transference of this concept to the field of poetic theory see Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics*, ch. 12, pp. 214 ff. On Landino's association with Ficino's Florentine circle see Della Torre, *Accademia Platonica*, pp. 513–14 and *passim*, and Field, *Origins of Platonic Academy*, ch. 9, pp. 231 ff.

¹⁰² For Landino's most explicit restatement of this purgative scheme see his *Camaldulensium disputationum libri quattuor* (Strassburg: Matthias Schürerius, 1508), lib. III, sig. G v^r, and on the Platonic frenzies as aids, F i^r. Cf. *Virgilius*, fol. 219^r.

If the theme of love served as one of the more conspicuous literary vehicles for the Platonic inspiration doctrine in Ficino's circle, another, also prominently evidenced by Landino, was the theme of poetic creativity. Complicating this question for those attracted to the divine frenzy theory was the concurrent entrance of Horace's rules of poetizing into their thinking. The human mind, the Horatian critics maintained, possesses an inborn attraction to balance, harmony, and symmetry, and a corresponding aversion to imbalance, disharmony, and asymmetry, for which reason the Horatian theory of aesthetics, when stringently applied, tended to find incongenial a genial theory that gave license to the dissolution of aesthetic boundaries. As we will subsequently observe, with the lines more sharply to be drawn during the second half of the cinquecento, some poetic critics partial to Horatian aesthetic principles perceived the line dividing rational decorum from divine inspiration to be a sharply drawn one. Others like Landino, however, who early in his career found Horace's poetic precepts of sufficient interest to comment favorably in them in an edition of his writings, apparently found little problem reconciling Horace's aesthetic precepts with their Platonic ones.¹⁰³

For Landino, as pointed up in the first of his *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (1474) debating the superiority of the contemplative and active lives, the Platonic frenzies were intrinsically bound up with the drive of the human soul to purge itself of terrestrial impurities in the course of its movement up the ladder of being. As Landino had his spokesman for the contemplative life, Alberti, argue in this connection: "No one, indeed, will properly administer either himself or the city unless he first will have purged from worldly contamination those virtues which correct our lives and customs, and then, after his soul has become thoroughly purified, will be so illuminated as to furnish knowledge of the highest things. This is the reason, so I believe, that the divine Plato . . . holds that states (*res publicas*) will finally be happy when they will be ruled by philosophers, or when the rulers will begin to philosophize."¹⁰⁴ Against this Macrobian-based argument, which he shared with Ficino,¹⁰⁵ Landino counterposes the weaker one of his choice for the spokesman of the civic ideal, Lorenzo de' Medici, who

¹⁰³ See, e.g., Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁴ *Disputationes Camaldulenses*, lib. I, in Garin, *Prosatori Latini*, pp. 728-31. On this tract see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 84-88.

¹⁰⁵ See above, p. 89.

appears willing to stop at a stage of civic virtue that has not yet progressed to a higher stage of the purgative virtues effected by the Platonic frenzies.

To be sure, there seems to be missing in Landino a corresponding association of divine frenzy with melancholy as advanced by Ficino in this same connection. Indeed, if we are to believe a depiction of melancholy by Landino in a marginal commentary on Dante's *Commedia divina*, the black bile would appear to be facilitative, not of the virtuous endeavor to escape worldly contamination, but rather of the viciously contaminated state from which the soul strives to be liberated. Thus, concerning the last of three countenances of Satan described by Dante, Landino wrote: "The third is black, by which is most aptly meant *accidia*, which proceeds from the melancholy humor, which is black; nor does it ever rejoice or ever brighten up the visage, but always remains gloomy."¹⁰⁶ But if Landino can be said to highlight the difficulty of some members of Ficino's circle in squaring the requirements of spiritual purification with a humor widely viewed to be implicated in diabolical machination, others in the same Platonic circle, among whom Agnolo Poliziano (= Politian, 1454–1494) stands out, did not display such hesitance.

The key to a physiological rendering of Plato's frenzies in the "Aristotelian" sense, as brought out by Poliziano in his *Liber miscellaneorum*, lies in the idea of mystical rapture, an insight put into express form by his contention that melancholy assists "that motion of the mind which in Greek is termed *ecstasis*." Those agitated by melancholy heated to the right temperature, reported this most philologically gifted member of Ficino's Florentine circle, are not ordinary people "but heroes and the highest sorts of men."¹⁰⁷ Distinguishing Poliziano's approach to this subject from that of the more amorously inclined members of Ficino's coterie, however, was his choice of

¹⁰⁶ Landino, *Dante con l'espositioni di Christoforo Landino*. . . . (Venice: Appresso Gio. Battista & Gio. Bernardo Sessa, 1596), fol. 159^v. Landino's commentary on Dante is reprinted in Robert Cardini, ed. *Cristoforo Landino: Scritti Critici e Teorici*, 2 vols. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), with this passage found in Vol. I, p. 145.

¹⁰⁷ Agnolo Poliziano, *Liber miscellaneorum*, cap. 90, in *Opera* (Basel: Apud Nicolaum Episcopium Juniorem, 1553), p. 302. On Poliziano's affiliation with the Florentine Academy see Della Torre, *Accademia Platonica*, pp. 657–8 and passim. However, bringing out Poliziano's departure from Ficino in key areas, most notably his shift of emphasis from a philosophical to more narrowly philological treatment of antiquity, see Garin, *Cultura Filosofica*, pp. 335 ff., and *Italian Humanism*, pp. 69 ff.

anger-inducing yellow cholera over love-inducing sanguine as a primary enkindling agent of melancholy. Or put another way, with the ancient hero Hercules his prime exemplar, it was, for Poliziano, heroic ire more than heroic love that acted as the main conduit through which melancholy came to bear on the Platonic frenzies.

Thus, invoking Hercules as his prototypical guide in a treatise addressed to the passion of anger, Poliziano declared that the black bile, especially when inflamed by its naturally fervid yellow relative among the humors, is as fully capable of noble as of ignoble behavior in those over whom it comes to dominate. Though provoked by his "sacred disease" (*sacer morbus*) to kill his own children in a fit of madness, observed Poliziano, Hercules was also instigated by his infirmity to perform his many great and admirable labors. Granting that, in its original cold state, melancholy induces such phlegmatic-like characteristics as stolidity, stupefaction, and idleness, Poliziano gleaned from his Herculean exemplar that melancholy ignited by the fire of the yellow bile is contrarily capable of making those in whom it burns "ingenious, vehement, and inclined to all kinds of passionate deeds (*ad omnem excandescitiam*)."¹⁰⁸ As the physicians attest, Poliziano noted in clarification of his genial theory, "heat is far more favorable to our nature than cold."¹⁰⁸

In this regard, moreover, in agreement with the Simonidean maxim permitting verbal images to be translated into visual ones, Poliziano expressly expanded his genial scope to include the fabricators of images painted on a wall or canvas. With Homer a leading case in point Poliziano depicted the poet as a kind of painter in words who employs his tongue in place of the brush to depict, under divine auspices, the scenes formed in his imagination. Accordingly, he entreated, "are we deceived if we call [the poet] a master of painting as well as an author? For as the saying of the sage [Simonides] goes, poetry is spoken painting, and, contrarily, painting is called mute poetry."¹⁰⁹ It followed for Poliziano that melancholy was as advantageous to the visual artist's creative process as to that of the literary artist, a view reputedly corroborated by Aristotle's contention

¹⁰⁸ Poliziano, *De ira*, in *Opera*, p. 474.

¹⁰⁹ Poliziano, *Oration in expositione Homeri*, in *Opera*, p. 489. For the Horatian mediation of this notion see above, p. 77. On Poliziano's poetic theory see Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics*, ch. 15, pp. 257 ff.

that among those excelling in genius through the effects of heated melancholy are men “who compose songs and cultivate the arts.”¹¹⁰ This is a lesson that a Florentine artist with youthful ties to Ficino’s Platonic circle, Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), pre-eminently took to heart, one who brought it to bear not only on his famed pictorial images, but also on poetic images furnished him by a stilnovist legacy he shared with Florence’s lovestruck ruler Lorenzo.¹¹¹

In the footsteps of Poliziano was his disciple Pietro Crinito (= Pietro Riccio, 1475–1507), who in his *De honesta disciplina* celebrated the “heroic” character of melancholy. Unlike his mentor, however, Crinito preferred love-inducing sanguine over anger-inducing yellow choler as the more appropriate igniting agent of what he dubbed “this heroic affection” (*heroicam hanc affectionem*), the upshot of which was to transform those “stolid and lazy” under the effects of cold melancholy into “men of genius and lovers” (*ingeniosos et amantes*) under the effects of moderately inflamed melancholy.¹¹² The reason that love and melancholy are so often found together, Crinito explained, is that “the sickness of love, being akin and similar to the black bile, is nothing other than a great desire of the soul for the image and form of a beautiful object which, taking possession of the lover and pressing on his eyes and soul, assiduously agitates and inflames the mind.”¹¹³

A fundamental plank of the educational program spelled out by Crinito in his *De honesta disciplina* consisted of the presumption that melancholic inflammation proceeds as readily from beautiful forms located in the higher spiritual regions as from those fixed in the lower material regions. In accordance with this presumption he construed

¹¹⁰ Poliziano, *Liber miscellaneorum*, in *Opera*, p. 677.

¹¹¹ Emphasizing the reciprocation between literary and artistic motifs in Michelangelo is Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, pp. 62 ff. For additional sonnets from Michelangelo’s hand see Holt, ed. *Documentary History of Art*, II, 21–24. On Michelangelo’s involvement in the Platonic revival see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Theories in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 1972), ch. 6, pp. 171 ff. Pictorial testimony to Michelangelo’s melancholy is furnished by Raphael in his Vatican *School of Athens*, the figure of which, assuming the usual melancholy pose, is seated below the central figures of Plato and Aristotle serving as the frontispiece of the present text.

¹¹² Pietro Crinito (= Riccio), *De honesta disciplina*, ed. Carlo Angeleri (Rome: Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1955), lib. I, cap. 6, p. 109. On Crinito’s association with the Florentine circle see Della Torre, *Accademia Platonica*, p. 30.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, lib. XVI, cap. 4, p. 325.

his task to be, not the wholesale discouragement of melancholy in his readers as errantly advised by more pedestrian educational writers, but instruction in how to convert inferior animal love into superior spiritual love. And for Crinito the means for that “heroic” conversion was not to be found in nature alone. It was assisted by powers transcending nature, termed by Plato the divine frenzies. If Plato’s love frenzy represented one such divinely based medium through which Crinito made connection between the melancholy lover and his heavenly residing beloved, another was the poetic frenzy.

Among the great Christian writers giving their special blessing to the poetic act, Crinito avouched, was St. Augustine, who declared “that poets flow forth with their songs, not by their own efforts, but by an alien voice, which was demonstrated by Plato in that book to which he gave the title *De furore poetico*.” The test case of this truth, he further gleaned from pseudo-Aristotle, a certain Malachus, “was an excellent poet, but in the act of bursting forth in song was made all the more pre-eminent as he became inwardly alienated of mind, as is also said to be true about the Bacchae and the Sibyls.” Leaving no doubt as to the identity of the natural correlate of Malachus’ supernaturally instigated alienation is the chapter heading holding Malachus to be among those “gravely vexed by the illness inflicted by the black bile.”¹¹⁴

Further harnessing the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius to the Platonic frenzy theory, incisively depicted in treatises with such titles as *De pulchro* and *De amore*, was Ficino’s protégé and reputed “second founder” of the Florentine Platonic Academy, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto (1466–1522). Those who, “when they see a man who is furious and insane, as though vexed by the black bile, ridicule and mock him,” Diacceto declared in his *De pulchro*, may very well be paying witness more to their own diagnostic limitations than to knowledge about the condition they are deriding, since looming behind the alienated state of mind they are taking to task may very well lie a cause far removed from one of human infirmity. Such an exception to the conventional medical diagnosis, Diacceto judged, is

¹¹⁴ Crinito, *De honesta disciplina*, lib. III, cap. 6, pp. 108–9. Crinito’s “Malachus” is most assuredly the obscure melancholy poet Maracus the Syracusan cited in the Aristotelian *Problemata*, XXX, 1.

the melancholy lover of a beautiful form located, not in this material realm, but in a transcendent spiritual one.

The object of this erroneously placed disdain, Diacceto elaborated, “full of divinity and occupied with divine matters (*plenus divinitatis, occupatusque numine*), does not bear himself in the usual human manner, but hides himself in a place far from others, carried hither and thither, without apparent design, by whatever force it is which seizes and propels him.” He is, that is to say, a vessel for what Plato called love frenzy, the ensuing melancholy of which those not sufficiently initiated in the divine mysteries are prone to mistake for human illness. The soul of one touched by this divinely ignited frenzy, Diacceto proclaimed, becomes enkindled into pure flame, is raised thereby, “as though it were a vapor, into a lofty place,” and finally, being far removed from everyday cares, “attains to that splendor where it is made clearly manifest that man is in the domicile of the gods.” Far from being symptoms of a diseased lover, continued Diacceto “these things, indeed, and many others into the bargain, marvelously produce the highest frenzy of all, the frenzy of love (*furor amatorius*).”¹¹⁵

To the extent that melancholy is found in conjunction with attributes like these, Diacceto agreed with Ficino, it is as a natural effect of a supernaturally-instigated aspiration of love. In a striking elaboration of this psychological phenomenon Diacceto painted with words an image of the melancholy lover bearing uncanny resemblance to the famous engraving *Melencolia I* by his German contemporary Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). When the soul is temporarily separated from the body in the act of amorous ecstasy, reflected Diacceto, “you will see it dare, by its love of its [heavenly] object, to spread its wings and strive, with its utmost strength, to fly upward. But finding its wings no longer adequate for flying, either being unable to raise themselves or able to raise themselves only a little, it becomes heavily weighted and soon falls downward.” Happily, he went on to report, this state of melancholy despondency on the part of the alienated lover is only a temporary one, since, once his detached soul “perceives its wings to have been lightened, and to have acquired

¹¹⁵ Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, *De pulchro*, lib. III, cap. 4, in *Opera omnia* (Basel: Per H. Petri, & P. Pernam, 1564), p. 80. This theme is further carried out by Diacceto in his *De amore*, following the *De pulchro* in the *Opera omnia*, pp. 90 ff. For Diacceto’s reiteration of Ficinian themes, esp. magical ones, see Walker, *Magic*, pp. 30–35.

its original vigor, it leaves this place of evils behind under its feet and flies away, in joy and alacrity, to the seat of its Fatherland."¹¹⁶

A related Ficinian theme finding resonance in Diacceto is magic, the result of which was his endowment of natural melancholy, in service to miracle-working love frenzy, with occult powers entering nature through celestial mediation.¹¹⁷ A related Ficinian theme similarly elicited by Diacceto from his mentor, resembling a similar rendition of the divine frenzy theory made by Crinito, is of the melancholy poet. In this regard, however, Diacceto also pointed up a paradox pertinent to the the harmonizing functions of poetry.

"The Pythagoreans," Diacceto pointed out, "believed they cured diseases by certain fixed harmonies," their explanation being that "the soul, having been recalled from external harmony into its own internal harmony, effects a like harmony in the body, because of the hold it has over it."¹¹⁸ According to this restatement of the Ficinian genial theory, the purifying musical harmonies conveyed by the *furor poeticus* are capable of simultaneously purging the soul of its melancholy contaminations and ecstatically lifting the soul, with the assistance of melancholy, to a higher state of existence. It followed for Diacceto, as for all others accepting the Ficinian take on human genius, that a fundamental distinction needed to be drawn between two forms of melancholy, one compatible and the other incompatible with the musical harmonies claimed by Plato, after Pythagoras, to be instrumental in conveying the soul to its heavenly destination.

The appeal of this outlook, it goes without saying, was not likely to remain confined within Florence's city walls. Aside from the fact that its leading proponents traveled and even lived for extended peri-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, lib. III, cap. 4, p. 89. The striking parallel between this literary image of melancholy by Diacceto and the Dürer engraving is curiously ignored in the pioneering study on this subject, Panofsky and Saxl, *Dürers 'Melencolia I'*, as in its augmented trans. by Klibansky as *Saturn and Melancholy*, the latter which, p. 278, presents Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535) as the likely mediator of this motif between Ficino and the north. It is of course possible that a theme originating in Ficino's circle redounded back on that circle; more particularly, Diacceto could have come into contact with Dürer's engraving, or at least heard of it, at some point in his career and discerned in its crestfallen figure an apt pictorial representation of what he was about in his *De pulchro*.

¹¹⁷ On the magical components of Diacceto's thought, including astrological ones, see Walker, *Magic*, pp. 30–35.

¹¹⁸ Diacceto, *De amore*, lib. III, cap. 3, p. 123.

ods outside the city, whereas others immigrated into the city from many other localities, the recently invented art of printing assured that the doctrine of melancholy genius forged by Ficino and his colleagues would be turned into a European-wide vogue. Limiting our parameters here to Italy, we will now, in a concluding section to this chapter, take stock of some of the more notable early non-Florentine representatives of the vogue of melancholy genius put into motion by Ficino. These included, as we will see, not only secularly oriented activities that we customarily identify with the Renaissance, but religiously oriented activities that we customarily identify with the Catholic Reformation.

C. *The Early Dissemination of Ficino's Genial Theory*

Should a given profession be singled out as throwing up one of the more formidable bulwarks against the theory of genial melancholy given currency by Ficino and his Florentine circle, we might well expect it to be the medical one, premised as it, not on the nurturing of melancholy, but on its curing. Yet not only the medically trained Ficino himself presents an exception to this rule, but also certain other physicians, such as Ficino's younger contemporary of Ferrara Giovanni Manardo (1462–1516). For Manardo followed Ficino in conceiving of medicine, not as an end in itself, but as a naturalist adjunct to higher Platonically based philosophical goals.

From the demonological end of this philosophical spectrum it is significant that Manardo's reading of a passage from a physician of an earlier time with comparable philosophical propensities, Avicenna, was one construing it in a precisely opposite way to the skeptical one generally placed on it. Thus, with explicit reference to Avicenna, Manardo contended that "melancholy comes to pass by means of a demon."¹¹⁹ And from the opposite end of the genial spectrum, centering on the Platonic frenzies, Manardo reluctantly conceded that, while it is the proper aim of a physician to seek the eradication of demonically incited melancholy, the same cannot be said for its divinely incited counterpart.

¹¹⁹ Giovanni Manardo, *Epistolarum medicinalium lib. XX* (Venice: Apud Petrum Schoeffer, Germanum Maguntinum, 1542), lib. VII, epist. 3, p. 109.

“The Greeks,” wrote Manardo, “declare that among the affections issuing from the melancholy humor is a certain divine passion (*divinam quandam passionem*), the effect of which is to invest those under its sway with such extraordinary powers as predicting the future.” Such divinely gifted souls, Manardo explained, called enthusiasts in popular parlance, “are said to be filled with God.” Further underscoring the genial potential of melancholy for a philosophically minded physician like Manardo was its comparably ancient association with rare powers of poetic creativity, an insight revealing a blending on his part of Platonic with Aristotelian strains of thought following the Ficinian lead. Poets vexed by melancholy, he noted with no hint of disagreement with their claim, “declare that they are agitated by a divine frenzy, and further exclaim that ‘there is a god within us which agitates us and by which we become enkindled.’”¹²⁰

Similarly placing melancholy in service to the divine frenzies, with special attention given to the astrological implications of their juncture, was the scholarly pivot of a Naples “academy” patterned after Ficino’s Florentine one, Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (1426–1503). The subject most straightforwardly highlighting the Platonic input into Pontano’s genial theory, as Manardo’s, was his consideration of extraordinary poetic facility, which he, in agreement with a long-standing Platonic tradition, perceived to be closely related to divinely imbued powers of prophecy. Thus, under the heading: “The resemblance between sibyls, prophets, and poets” in a chapter of his *De fortuna*, Pontano pointed out that poets, like prophets, are as likely to be found among the unlearned as the learned, “oftentimes,” he observed, “even in an ignorant peasant or in illiterate and half-mad little old woman.” Rare poetic ability like its prophetic affilate, Pontano maintained in accord with the genial theory reaching him from Florence, is the result, not of intellectual cerebration, but of an innate instinct of the poet’s soul instilled by divine frenzy.¹²¹ Extending the

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De fortuna*, lib. I, in *Opera omnia*, 3 vols. (Venice: In aedibus Aldi et Andreae Soceri, 1518–9), I, fol. 280^v–281^r. According to Alfred Dorn, “Fortuna im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance,” *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, p. 125n, Pontano here presented “eine erste seelische Analyse des vom Genius Getriebenen in moderner Zeit.” On Pontano’s general literary and moral interests see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 73–4, and Mario Santoro, “Humanism in Naples,” in Rabil, *Renaissance Humanism*, I, 304–7, and on his poetic theory, Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics*, ch. 16, pp. 274 ff.

same principle to other genial functions in his *De rebus coelestibus*, most notably to powers of philosophical abstraction, Pontano further upheld the proposition that divine frenzy can employ a material mediator, with an enkindled melancholy humor furnishing the optimal candidate. As Pontano placed a commonplace simile in service to his subject: "It seems to me that the black bile is very similar to that stone called flint (*silex*) which, when struck by iron or rubbed by another stone, catches fire and emits it forth. In the same manner bile which has been enkindled grows hot, and moves that faculty (*vim*) whose power it is to think, to contemplate, and to discern." In light of this analogy Pontano further reasoned that, "by virtue of the fixed and stable quality of this humor, to whatever art someone may have applied his mind, in the performance of that art he possesses, under the influence of this humor, very fixed and very assiduous cogitations." By virtue, that is to say, both of divine goading and a natural complexion, the melancholic, Pontano asserted, is permitted "utterly to excel in a given art, the result of painstakingly thinking, diligently investigating, and continuously exercising his mind."¹²²

For Pontano, then, as for Ficino, the varieties of human genius were more notable for what united than what divided them, the common denominator being a moderately enkindled melancholy humor. An underlying kinship between philosophical inquiry and the creative arts, the astrologically versed Pontano again agreed with Ficino, can be further validated by the observation that melancholy, the affliction *par excellence* of poets, artists, and philosophers alike, is governed by the planet Saturn. It is not by chance, Pontano noted, that Saturn, like the melancholy humor over which it rules, displays an ambivalent countenance, now injuring and now benefitting those under its sway.

At one extreme, "by reason of an inborn malignity," Pontano explicated, Saturn "infects souls with envy, avarice, solicitude, the love of solitude, austerity, hypocrisy, squalor, humility, abjection, grief, sadness, fraudulence, and laziness, which vices accompany Saturnian fermentation in its cold quality and are the nature of the star itself." At the opposite extreme, however, showing a favorable side of its celestial countenance to counteract its unfavorable side, Saturn is

¹²² Pontano, *De rebus coelestibus libri XIV*, lib. IV, cap. 6, in *Opera omnia*, III, fols. 159^v-160^r. On Pontano's astrological outlook see Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, pp. 31-35.

able to endow those in whom it is present with such highly desirable genial advantages as “rectitude of judgment and prudence; contemplation and knowledge of occult matters; a careful lingering over and weighing out of deeds which are being performed; and constancy, firmness, deliberateness, pertinacity, and conquest.”¹²³ In its role as a humoral agent of Saturn, Pontano contended, the black humor exerts diverse influences on human behavior corresponding to the degree of heat applied, with melancholy in a cold or excessively adust form prone to incite the vicious attributes associated with Saturn in its maleficent aspect and a moderately heated form of melancholy prone to incite the virtuous genial attributes associated with Saturn in its beneficent aspect.

Another example of a wider Italian receptivity to Ficino’s genial theory is furnished by the Venetian Franciscan Francesco Giorgi (= Zorzi, 1466–1540), who, moreover, as brought out in his *De harmonia mundi* (1525), added to a mix of philosophy with Neoplatonic and Hermetic magic the Cabalism of Pico. Announcing as his objective in this work, in keeping with its unifying theme provided him by Pythagoras, “a man well-harmonized with God” (*homo bene chordatus cum Deo*),¹²⁴ Giorgi also let it be known, with reliance on Ficino, that the musical purification of the soul making possible that sublime goal is not bereft of natural aids. One such valuable aid is melancholy, of which, Giorgi concurred with Ficino, we are advised to make constructive use before finally eliminating it.

Why, Giorgi asked, did Hermes Trismegistus refer to man as a great miracle—a *magnum miraculum*? Because, he answered, the mind of man, in relation to its Creator, “in essence is not separated from Him, but is still conjoined just as surely as the ray of the sun is joined to the sun.” This, Giorgi submitted, is the meaning behind Trismegistus’ pronouncement that “some who are among the num-

¹²³ *De rebus coelestibus*, lib. IV, cap. 5, in *Opera omnia*, I, 159^o.

¹²⁴ Francesco Giorgi, *De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria* (Venice: In aedibus Bernardini de Vitalibus Chalcographi, 1525), cant. III, ton. 4, cap. 12: “Solus homo bene chordatus cum Deo vivit laetus,” fols. 50^o ff. Repr. Paris, with pagination, in 1545. Selections from this work, edited by Cesare Vasoli, can be found in Garin et al., ed. *Testi Umanistici su l’Ermetismo* (Rome: Fratelli Bocca, 1955), pp. 79 ff. On Giorgi see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 450–52, and Walker, *Magic*, pp. 112–19. Highlighting the influence of Ficino on Giorgi’s ideas is Cesare Vasoli, “Marsilio Ficino e Francesco Giorgio Veneto,” in Garfagnini, ed. *Marsilio Ficino e il Ritorno di Plato*, II, 533 ff.

ber of men are called gods, and their humanity is very near to divinity."¹²⁵ Concerning our yearning for proximity to divinity, asked Giorgi in the alchemical-like language typical of the Christian mystics, "what is the Kingdom of Heaven except God Who, when we are transmuted into to Him, is also transmuted into us?" Also in the expected manner of the mystics, Giorgi declared solitude to be a fundamental requisite of divine *conversio*. Though conceding that much pain and discomfort can often be found attached to the act of solitary purification, Giorgi stressed that this is an incidental rather than essential product of its rigorous demands, made clear in the asseveration: "If, however, this transmutation, which presupposes withdrawal into solitude and abstention from every illicit pleasure, is followed by distress and affliction, this is by accident and does not issue from the essence of penitence or of its ensuing transmutation."¹²⁶ But when he came to a consideration of one special instance of such "distress and affliction," melancholy, Giorgi suggested that the suffering induced by solitary *conversio* could also play an active role in its facilitation.

Helping Giorgi to clarify the advantageous potential of melancholy was ancient mythology, the relevant divinities of which, Jupiter and Saturn, also occupy planetary spheres. When Saturn was overthrown by Jupiter, according to Giorgi, he first took refuge in the East, where he induced a pronounced attraction to the solitary and speculative life. From there he moved westward, via Greece, to Italy, "where he began to raise up the genius (*ingenia*) of the Italians." Saturn is said to have arrived in Italy from Greece, according to Giorgi, "because sublime and profound speculations came from the Greeks to the Italians," in which capacity Saturn "prizes solitary and divine men."¹²⁷ In the same capacity, he added, Saturn rules over the melancholy humor, seated in the spleen, which Giorgi, like Ficino, placed in the service of solitary contemplation.

In agreement with Ficino's astrologically conditioned version of human genius Giorgi declared that Saturn, through the mediation of the melancholy humor constituting the natural receptacle of its effusions, inclines the soul toward "a more secret and profound wisdom"

¹²⁵ Giorgi, *In scripturam sacram problemata*, excerpted in Garin et al., eds. *Testi scelti*, p. 95.

¹²⁶ Giorgi, *De harmonia mundi*, cant. III, ton. 6, cap. 8, fol. 61'.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, cant. I, ton. 3, cap. 10, fol. 47'.

(*secretioris, & profundioris sapientiae*).¹²⁸ But Giorgi also followed Ficino in recognizing an unfavorable side to Saturn's influence. If the saturnine temperament "should be depressed," Giorgi acknowledged, it can lead to such undesirable characteristics as melancholy dejection, a preference for black clothing, physical and mental sluggishness, and a desire for solitary isolation in dark, hidden, and putrid places which are repugnant to most human beings. When, on the other hand, the saturnine temperament "is well disposed, it bears one both to very profound depths and to sublime heights."¹²⁹

Concerning one of the more prominent genial attributes detectible in melancholy saturnines, prophetic insight, Giorgi was careful to distinguish legitimate vaticinal powers from their illegitimate look-alike inspired by the demons. Conceding that prognostic abilities may also be discovered in certain false prophets, Giorgi explained that in ancient times these illicit psychics, "vulgarly called magicians, summoned impure intelligences from whom they came to know future events (*rerum eventus*)."¹³⁰ Needless to say, however, Giorgi, whose announced goal of "a man well-harmonized with God" found in the holy prophet the perfected personification of his ideal, did not leave the matter there, going on to devote considerable attention to the problem of how to tell the divine form of prognostication from its diabolical counterfeit. That melancholy is as effectual in promoting divine as demonic prophecy was attested for Giorgi by the ancient gentile prophets, who, being grateful for Saturn's role in stimulating their accurate predictions, sang eloquent praises to their planetary inspirer and protector, "and to the golden age that proceeded under his care."¹³¹

The decisive role assigned by Giorgi to planetary Saturn in the instigation of genial insight, however, presented him with a paradox that he did not wish to leave simply hanging. For, like Ficino before him, Giorgi embedded his doctrine of genius, including philosophical genius, in the arcane potency of love, the impulsively volatile passions of which were more commonly associated with Venus than with Saturn. Man, Giorgi declared, is born to be united with God, "provided that the power of love (*vis illa amoris*) intercedes, which

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, cant. I, ton. 6, cap. 23, fol. 116^v.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 117^r.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, cant. III, ton. 3, cap. 3, fol. 40^r v.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, cant. I, ton. 3, cap. 10, fol. 47^v.

unites the lover with the beloved."¹³² Concomitantly, Giorgi was faced with rationalizing how a venereal attraction to other human beings could be turned to the needs of saturnine speculation in solitude. Giorgi solved this paradox in two stages.

In a preliminary venereal stage, according to Giorgi, "the concupiscent virtue, that is to say, natural love (*amor naturalis*), whose seat is humid and hot, is stifled and suppressed," causing the lovelorn melancholic to be "severed from human society." And in a second saturnine stage, he continued, the amorous yearning of the solitary love is redirected from coveted mundane to supermundane objects, and the lover of material forms, in corresponding fashion, transformed into "a lover and seeker of the Good, of great and steadfast counsel, and of divine and secret things."¹³³ The sublime object of this amorous solitary pursuit, Giorgi added in the language of the mystics, is obtainable "through transmutation (*per transmutationem*), which is accomplished through ecstasy and a certain excess of fervor."¹³⁴ Spiritual *transmutatio* as here evinced, for Giorgi as for Ficino, connotes more than love frenzy in the philosophical sense imparted by Plato. It also connotes love in the occult or magical sense—as *magia amoris*—transmitted through the ancient Hermetic and Neoplatonic traditions.

In further agreement with Ficino's genial theory, underscored by his maxim *homo bene chordatus cum Deo*, Giorgi extended the range of love's magic from the love of wisdom, the province of philosophy, to the love of beauty, the province of poetry and the arts. Poetry, according to Giorgi, came into existence in the form of musical refrain, the prime biblical exemplar of which, David, accompanied his poetic strains on the lyre. In this connection Giorgi can be seen to have marked out a certain departure from Ficino. For whereas, concerning the hierarchy of senses subject to Saturn's planetary effusions, Ficino did not generally feel the need to choose between seeing and hearing as superior ways to arrive at divine beauty, Giorgi expressly and consistently upheld the superiority of hearing over seeing.

"As Alcibiates testifies," wrote Giorgi in this regard, Saturn "rules over the ears above all other receptive senses. . . . And hearing is

¹³² *Ibid.*, cant. III, ton. 6, cap. 17, fol. 68^r.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, cant. I, ton. 3, cap. 10, fols. 47^v–48^r.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, cant. III, ton. 6, fol. 68^r.

the most spiritual of all the senses, and consequently an instrument of secret and profound wisdom towards which Saturn inclines us with special virtue." With Saturn his planetary ruler, according to this precept, the sapient hears the truth prior to envisioning it. "Upon hearing, as Scripture states," attested Giorgi, "the wise man will be made all the wiser."¹³⁵ In this way Giorgi established a fundamental nexus between the musical arts—the equivalent of chanted poetry—and philosophy. Or put another way, for Giorgi the noblest poetic expression ultimately converged with the most profound of philosophical understanding, a view corroborated by the observation that philosophical and poetic genius alike are mediated by the planetary instigator of melancholy, Saturn.

"And this is the property of saturnines," proclaimed Giorgi in elaboration of this point, "that they might hear and, after ruminating in silence the things which have been heard, might enter into the innermost and most secret shrines where, by a long-lasting and tedious consideration of many things, they might, by their acquired knowledge, be shown to be prudent men." The celestial source for this rare gift of musical hearing, Giorgi added, "is of a super-worldly and celestial Saturn, called by the Hebrews *bina*, which they interpret as intelligence or prudence." Never mind that Saturn also dominates over the bodily organ most directly triggering melancholy, the spleen, which, Giorgi reminded his readers, "as Galen and Avicenna testify, is a vessel and receptacle overflowing with terrestrial and gross substances chiefly governed by Saturn." It followed for Giorgi, following Ficino, that the melancholy induced by Saturn as a physiological correlate of its musical inspiration should be considered, not as something detrimental to the philosophical and artistic professions, but rather as something that can fruitfully work on their behalf.¹³⁶

But while it is true that Giorgi relegated the visual to the auditory arts, it is equally true that his historical significance was not restricted to the auditory arts. It also extended to the visual arts, most notably, architecture, which, for Giorgi as for Alberti earlier,

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, cant. I, ton. 6, cap. 23, fol. 116^v. As noted above, p. 105, Ficino was intent on upholding, not the ascendancy of seeing over hearing, but rather the joint ascendancy of hearing and seeing over the senses of touch, taste, and smell. As such, Ficino maintained, seeing and hearing, in association with philosophical "thinking," are essentially translatable into one another.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

presented to the sight the same principles of mathematical concordances that music presented to the hearing.¹³⁷ In this matter, however, a very different attitude toward the problem of artistic melancholy was exhibited by Giorgi than by Alberti. For whereas Alberti had only reluctantly permitted melancholy into the ambience of his scholarly and artistic ruminations, considering it to be a regrettable price to be paid for the scholar-artist's temporary severance from the public domain, Giorgi, in the wake of the Florentine Platonic revival, upheld the ability of melancholy to assist the poet-artist in achieving his yearned-for "harmony with God."

Another early Renaissance scholar to take Ficino's lead in upholding melancholy's utility for spiritual and intellectual advancement, the erudite antiquarian Ludovico Ricchieri (= Caelius Rhodiginus, ca. 1450–1525), declared in his *Lectiones antiquas* that the ancient pagan mystics and prophets had anticipated their Christian successors by utilizing moderately heated melancholy as an aid to their solitary endeavors; through the agitations of such marvel-working melancholy, proclaimed Ricchieri, "the Sibyls and Bacchae were produced, and all those who are believed to have been instigated by a divine breath." Another name for this divinely enkindled form of melancholy alienation, proffered Ricchieri, is enthusiasm, termed such by St. Paul because under its force "the entire soul is lighted up by God."¹³⁸ Pointing up the extraordinary prophetic powers belonging to a divinely illuminated soul, with Cicero as well as Aristotle his authority, Ricchieri emphasized corresponding prophetic possibilities residing in the melancholy humor; as the relevant passage extracted from Cicero's *De divinatione* (I, 81) has it, melancholics "possess something in their souls that is foreknowing and divine (*presagiens atque divinum*)."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ In this regard Giorgi was personally engaged in an architectural program for a Venetian church, the San Francesco della Vigna, based on the Pythagorean-Platonic philosophical program established in his *De harmonia mundi*. On this project see Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, pp. 102 ff.

¹³⁸ Ludovico Celio Ricchieri (= Lodovicus Caelius Rhodiginus), *Lectionum antiquarum libri XXX* (Basel: Froben, 1542), lib. XVII, cap. 1, p. 625. Cf. lib. XVII, cap. 4, p. 629: "Enthusiasmus est quidem mentis stupor, sed ex illustratione divina. . . ."

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* Of course Ricchieri does not disclose that Cicero, after quoting this passage, disagreed with it. See, e.g., Schleiner, *Melancholy*, p. 23n.

And why, Ricchieri further queried in this regard, are melancholics better suited for prophesying than other temperamental types? For the same reason, he answered with help from an analogy elicited from Aristotle's *De somno et vigilia*, that trained hunters are better suited to targeting their prey than those unskilled in the hunting art; in Ricchieri's restatement of this analogy: "Just as hunters virtually possess their wild prey by the thrust of their spear even before they approach it, so do melancholics, by a rapacious agility of mind, anticipate and foresee future things."¹⁴⁰ For Ricchieri as for Ficino, the inner bond linking these diverse genial forms consisted of the passion of love. Picking up on the presumed linguistic connection between the words *heros* and *eros* conveyed by the medical writers, Ricchieri declared that, just as Homer attributed "power and frenzy to certain of the heroes inspired by God," by the same token, as pointed out by Plato, "love has the identical effect upon lovers."¹⁴¹

As for the inner workings of love capable of producing such "heroic" effects, Ricchieri invoked the common mystical image of alchemical-like transmutation. Love, Ricchieri averred, behaves as a transformative agent—a *causa conversionis*—which seeks to change the mind of the lover "into the divine beauty and form" of its beloved.¹⁴² As Dionysius the Areopagite (6th cent.) and other theorists of the mystical life understood, it is the nature of divine love to descend to human beings and infuse their souls with love "so that they might be turned toward more sublime and powerful things."¹⁴³ But while of supernatural origin, Ricchieri further acknowledged, divine love is not bereft of natural assistance in its assigned task of effecting inward purity of soul. Such a natural aid is found in moderately heated melancholy, termed by Aristotle an "heroic affection" (*heroica affectio*) corresponding to the heroic powers of love.¹⁴⁴ Assisted by an analogy lifted from the Aristotelian *Problemata*, Ricchieri compared the black bile to iron which, when exposed to coldness, itself becomes cold but, when touched by heat, grows hot and transfers that heat to everything in its vicinity. In keeping with this analogy, declared

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. XXVII, cap. 12, p. 1034.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, lib. XXIII, cap. 4: "Cur amor heros dicitur, item eros . . .," p. 881.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, lib. XXIII, cap. 2, p. 880.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, lib. XVI, cap. 24, p. 621.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, lib. XVII, cap. 5, p. 631: "Nam & heroica dicitur affectio, id est, *heroikon pathos*."

Ricchieri, those dominated by cold melancholy remain "dull and sluggish," whereas those affected by heated melancholy, such as sanguine-enkindled lovers, "become highly roused and ingenious, amorous, greatly inclined toward anger and cupidity, and sometimes even to considerable loquacity."¹⁴⁵

As amatory theory went in keeping with this line of thought, so went poetic theory. And just as the theme of love frenzy sometimes came up against an opposing call for love's moderation, likewise, with the precepts of Horace increasingly brought to bear on the issue, did the the corresponding theme of poetic frenzy. Against the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy the Horatians could argue that the exigencies of poetic invention called, not for the passive reception of immeasurable supernatural emanations originating outside the poet's mind, but for the active imposition of measured rules of decorum upon the poet's imagination. And against the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius the Horatians could argue that poetic composition is dependent, not on the imaginative faculty susceptible to natural influences, but on the rational faculty in structural insulation from the evanescent imagination. Nevertheless, at least in the earlier stages of the Horatian revival for which Landino was a foremost exemplar, it was not self-evident to all critics that the Platonic-Aristotelian and Horatian precepts of poetic creativity contradicted one another. Further early cinquecento examples of an endeavor to synthesize the two positions were those of Marco Girolamo Vida (1485–1566) and Aulo Giano Parrasio (1470–ca. 1530).

Thus, in his metered *De arte poetica* (1527) patterned after that of Horace, Vida declared the true poet to be, not a mere versifier as some critics erroneously maintained, but a versifying luminary and prophet.¹⁴⁶ Similarly assuming compatibility between Horatian's rules of poetic decorum and Plato's apparent willingness for a chosen few to break those rules was Parrasio, who, in one of the earliest Horatian commentaries after Landino's, proudly proclaimed in praise of poets that "those accustomed to narrating such divine things are not

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, lib. XVII, cap. 1, p. 625.

¹⁴⁶ Marco Girolamo Vida, *De arte poetica*, cited in Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, II, 716. Vida served as bishop of Alba. Vida's original Latin text, together with Christopher Pitt's eighteenth-century trans. (London: A Bettesworth, 1725) is found in Albert S. Cook, ed. *The Art of Poetry: The Poetical Treatises of Horace, Vida, and Boileau*. . . (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1892).

mere men, but heroes."¹⁴⁷ But whereas Vida left Aristotle's corresponding theory of melancholy genius out of his Horatian-Platonic mix, the same cannot be said for Parrasio, who, more controversially, expressly held to be accordant with his Horatian principles Aristotle's attribution to the inspired poet of melancholy, which, he proclaimed in keeping with a Ficinian axiom, "is an heroic affection" (*affectio est heroica*).¹⁴⁸

All of the above contributors to the genial vogue inaugurated by Ficino clothed their ideas in Latin. If this situation had rigorously held up, the Ficinian doctrine of melancholy genius would scarcely have reached beyond the academies. Fortunately for its larger Italian proliferation, however, for which Lorenzo de' Medici's poems and commentaries can be considered harbingers, Ficino's genial theory also found its way into the *volgare*. In this way what had begun as a somewhat narrowly constricted academic exercise of the Florentine Platonists became broadened, as time passed, into popular currency. Sometimes an appeal to genial alienation was expressed, in purely Platonic terms, as divine frenzy, whereas other times, closer to the view of Ficino himself, it was expressed in the hybrid Platonic-Aristotelian form of divinely inspired melancholy. Of the literary genres taking a lead in passing the torch of the melancholy theme from the Latin to the Italian language, two are especially prominent. The first genre consists of expositions of poetic criticism, and the second genre, of expositions of the nature of love.

* * *

"Just as the year and not the field produces the fruit," as Giovanni Fuscano (16th cent.) put the basic premise of his poetic criticism in his *Della oratoria e poetica facoltà* (1531), "so does the divine frenzy and not the man produce the poem." Such divinely inspired poetry, Fuscano agreed with his contemporary Vida, can also be looked on as a form of prophecy, "for if one investigates with diligence the qualities of the poet and the prophet, he will find not a little simi-

¹⁴⁷ Aulo Giano Parrasio, *In Q. Horatii Flacci artem poeticam commentaria*. . . . (Naples: Opera et diligentia Joannis Sultzbachii Hagenovensis, 1531), fol. 1^r. On Parrasio see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 96-97. For a general summary of Horatian poetic theory see Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, "Humanism and Poetics," in Rabil, *Renaissance Humanism*, III, 103-107, with Parrasio cited at p. 104.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 67^v.

larity between the one and the other." From an educational perspective it followed for Fuscano that "poetry is all the more divine than the other liberal disciplines as the divine frenzy from which it is born is more excellent than every human excellence." As for him who judges otherwise, namely, "that this art is human and not divine," Fuscano declared him to be deserving of this exalted art "solely by virtue of his sensible part."¹⁴⁹

In keeping with the Horatian maxim *ut pictura poesis*, this is a theory of art which was also readily transferrable to its visual forms. It was with such an expansion of the Platonic inspiration theory in mind, for example, that one of the most famous of the purveyors of this vogue in the vulgar tongue, Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), included among the skills ascribed to his perfect courtier "the knowledge of drawing and the possession of how to draw and acquaintance with the art of painting . . ." (*il saper disegnare, ed aver cognizion dell'arte propria del dipingere*).¹⁵⁰ It is not by chance that Castiglione also acted as a foremost conduit for Platonic love to the Renaissance, eloquently summarized in the culminating praise of love ascribed to Cardinal Bembo in the fourth book of the *Cortegione*. The soul under the force of the love frenzy, exclaims Castiglione's Bembo, "senses a certain hidden savor of true angelic beauty, and, ravished by the splendor of that light, begins to kindle and to pursue it so eagerly that it is almost drunk and beside itself in its desire to unite itself to that beauty, thinking to have found the footprint of God, in the contemplation of which it seeks to rest in its blessed end."¹⁵¹ Such supreme beauty, Castiglione reconfirmed a basic principle of Ficino's genial theory, is first made accessible through the eyes and ears before being made available to the intellect.

As writers like Vida, Fuscano, and Castiglione illustrate, reference to the Platonic frenzies did not necessarily entail a corresponding invocation of the Aristotelian doctrine of genial melancholy in its service. The case was different, however, for certain other purveyors

¹⁴⁹ Giovanni Fuscano, *Della oratoria e poetica facoltà*, in Bernard Weinberg, ed. *Trattati di Poetica e Retorica del Cinquecento*, 3 vols. (Bari, Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1970), I, 191. On Fuscano's Platonic principles see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 261–62.

¹⁵⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: Doubleday, 1959), bk. I, p. 77. For original Italian see *Il libro del cortegiano*, in *Opere volgari e latine* (Padua: Presso Giuseppe Comino, 1733), p. 57. Castiglione's spokesman here is Count Ludovico da Canossa.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, bk. IV, pp. 353–54.

of the Platonic vogue radiating out of Florence, who, more in keeping with the fuller implications of Ficino's genial theory, declared the doctrine of divine frenzy to find a fitting material aid in a moderately enkindled black bile. Especially as guided by Ficino's musings as presented in his *De amore*, these kinds of musings were endowed with a systematic philosophical matrix out of which could arise a new literary genre, generally in dialogue form: the *trattato d'amore*.¹⁵² Aptly illustrating this genre for our purposes are a Jewish emigré of Portuguese descent, Leone Ebreo (= Jehudah Abarbanel, ca. 1475–1530) and a learned Mantuan courtier, Mario Equicola (1470–ca. 1525).

In his *Dialoghi d'Amore*, posthumously published in 1535, Leone Ebreo distinguished between two forms of the amorous passion, the first "bridled" (*amore frenato*), and the second, "unbridled" (*amore sfrenato*). Bridled love, Leone has his protagonist Filone inform us, "is subject to the finite limits of reason," a primary object of which is "to guide and preserve men" in their corporeal capacity, whereas its unbridled counterpart has as its object, not mere physical preservation and well-being, but "the infinite vision of God." In the latter, unbridled form raising the lover to the infinite, we are instructed by Leone's Filone, love is sometimes seen to contravene the rational drive for self-preservation, even going so far as to drive the lover to commit suicide. The reason? "Many love God so much that they 'unlove' (*disamano*) themselves, even as unhappy men love themselves so much that they cease to love God."¹⁵³

According to Leone's Filone only "bridled" love, that is, love governed by reason in accordance with the demands of civic conviviality, is essentially free of melancholic discontentment. The same cannot be said, however, for the unbridled form of love, which, since it aspires to a visage of beauty located beyond rather than within the finite network of human relationships, behaves as "an enemy of

¹⁵² The popularity of this genre is attested in a modern collection of sixteenth century representatives edited by G. Zonta, *Trattati d'amore del Cinquecento* (Bari: 1912). Cf. P. Lorenzetti, *La Bellezza e l'Amore nei Trattati del' 500* (Pisa, 1920), and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 126–8.

¹⁵³ Leone Ebreo, *The Philosophy of Love [Dialoghi d'Amore]*, trans. F. Friedeberg-Seeley and Jean Barnes (London: The Soncino Press, 1937), dial. I, p. 59. The original text for this passage can be found in the modern Italian ed. of Santino Caramella (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1929), p. 54. On this work see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 123–26, and David B. Ruderman, "The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism*, I, 382–433, esp. pp. 407 ff.

pleasure and of society." One so afflicted, declares Filone, is "full of passions, hemmed by sufferings, tormented by dejection, crucified by desire, cruelly afflicted by suspicion, pierced by jealousy, without respite in his distress, without rest from his labours, attended even by sorrow and full of sighs, never unbowed by griefs or wrongs."¹⁵⁴

Compared to so effusive an outpouring of a kind of love admitted by Leone's Filone to being the source of an excruciating affliction, the plea of the opposing speaker Sofia that he impose limits of prudence on his love rings hollow. "My spirit is aflame, my heart ablaze, and all my person one consuming fire," Filone replies.¹⁵⁵ Such overbearing suffering—diagnosed as melancholy by the physicians—is the price one must pay whose object of love lies beyond the finite sphere. Whereas the form of love counseled by Sofia is merely ordinary (*ordinario*), the purpose of which is "to sustain and preserve men in the good life," Filone is seized by an extraordinary (*straordinario*) form of love that will not rest until it achieves union with its infinitely removed object of beauty.¹⁵⁶

Leone Ebreo's infinitely aspiring *amore straordinario* is of course the same form of love to which Ficino, taking his lead not only from Plato but also from the medical tradition, had applied the adjective "heroic," designated by the physicians a species of melancholy. That the resemblance between the words for love (*eros*) and hero (*heros*) was more than coincidental was reaffirmed by Leone's contemporary Mario Equicola, who addressed this subject under the title *Di natura d'amore* (1525). "Of all the passions," Equicola exclaimed as a basic postulate of the work at hand, "none is more vehement than this amorous one."¹⁵⁷ As to why this is so, Equicola defined love as

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, dial. I, p. 60 (*Dialoghi*, ed. Caramella, pp. 54–55).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61 (*Dialoghi*, p. 55).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–3 (*Dialoghi*, pp. 56–57).

¹⁵⁷ Mario Equicola, *Di natura d'amore* (Venice: Gio. Battista Bonfadino, 1607), lib. IV, fols. 190^v–191^r. First ed.: Venice, 1525. According to Enrico Musacchio, "The Role of the Senses in Mario Equicola's Philosophy of Love," in Beecher and Ciavolella, *Eros and Anteros*, p. 94—this on the basis both of a markedly elevated stature assigned to the senses by Equicola and of his countering of altruistic with self-love, the basic affiliations of Equicola's philosophy of love were with Pomponazzi rather than with Ficino. In this regard Musacchio (p. 87 and note 2, p. 96) takes those to task, like John Charles Nelson in his *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's 'Eroici Furori'* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1955, 1958), who have "Platonized" Equicola's philosophy of love. The reading of Equicola here presented, on the other hand, better accords with the traditional Platonic interpretation of Equicola than with Musacchio's "Aristotelian" interpretation.

“a certain passionate action and assiduous thought upon the thing desired, with a confidence in the fulfillment of that final imagined pleasure in the beloved,”¹⁵⁸ or, alternatively put, a yearning for “that which one does not possess, and possessing it, one desires to possess it forever.”¹⁵⁹

At the level of civic engagement corresponding to what Leone Ebreo termed “bridled love,” it is true, Equicola appears to confirm a favored theme of the civic humanists associating solitary severance from the town with melancholy. “Fleeing busy activity (*negocii*) does not make a man happy,” he counseled in this regard, “but, on the contrary, idleness and negligence induces melancholy.”¹⁶⁰ At a higher, transcendent level, however, with the heroes of ancient times serving as apt paradigms, Equicola acknowledged that melancholy could as readily issue out of striving too high as falling too low. Pertinent to his analysis of love lay not only the literary texts praising the exploits of the ancient heroes, but also the medical texts expounding the physiological rationale for the melancholy of “heroic lovers” and Ficino’s philosophical revaluation of heroic love as the mark of human genius.

As Plato testifies, wrote Equicola, “the word for ‘heroes’ has derived from *erotos*, that is to say, love, and the semi-divine heroes have been so named because all the heroes were born from the love of the gods toward feminine mortals, or from that of men toward the gods.”¹⁶¹ But there is also, Equicola added, an underlying substantive reason for the connection between these two words. “A man truly enamored, now with a superabundance of joy and now in a state of lowly sorrow,” he declared, “lives beyond the law of nature and surpasses all mediocrity (*vive fuori della legge di natura, & da ogni mediocrità*.)” Such heroically conditioned love, Equicola determined, is essentially at one with the alienated state characteristic of the reli-

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. II, “Diffinitione d’amore,” fol. 106^v.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, lib. II, fol. 56^v. Serving to reinforce this Platonic reading of Equicola’s philosophy of love, as distinct from Musacchio’s as indicated in note 157 above, is his view of the arts. Thus, following the usual Platonic criteria for assessing the relative stature of the arts in his *Institutioni*. . . (Milan, 1541), cited in Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy*, p. 52, Equicola exalted poetry over painting inasmuch as “painting is a work and a labour more of the body than of the mind, and is more often than not exercised by the ignorant.”

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. V, fol. 310^r.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, lib. II, “Del nome d’amore,” fol. 78^v.

gious mystics. As Equicola explained in this connection, the object of love “is the contemplation of perceived beauty and imagined pleasure, with the hope of attaining them; thus the intense meditation, and there is caused in one, beyond all measure, that alienation called ecstasy.”¹⁶²

While Equicola concurred with his Jewish contemporary Leone Ebreo in distinguishing love provoking one to live “beyond the law of nature” from the conventional or “ordinary” form of love serving as the principal binding agent of social cohesion, he went a crucial step beyond Leone by maintaining that the two forms of love are disjoined, not substantially, but only functionally; at bottom, he was persuaded, they are of identical constitution and share a common origin in Heaven. “The love of man for man,” as Equicola summarized this conviction, “is a powerful vinculum for binding and uniting our human souls with divinity.”¹⁶³ By the same token, also putting him at odds with Leone, Equicola rejected the notion of the ascetics that divine love entails hatred of self. Thus, in stark contrast to Leone’s proclamation, cited above, that “many love God so much that they ‘unlove’ themselves,” Equicola proclaimed in his *De natura d’amore* that “he who loves God also loves himself.”¹⁶⁴ The sequence of loving, Equicola maintained, is cyclical, so that “first a man loves himself through the appropriate welfare of himself; then, through faith, he begins to love God, not through God but through himself; afterwards, by reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating, he loves God, and through God he loves himself.”¹⁶⁵ For Equicola, that is to say, egoistic human love, far from being exclusive of divine love, is encompassed and contained by divine love.

In spelling out his notion of “heroic love” Equicola found himself walking a fine line between its medical and philosophical versions, with the former treating it as a disease to be cured and the latter, in its Ficinian revaluated rendition, treating it as a condition to be cultivated. “The physicians,” Equicola noted, “believe that love is a perturbation very near to, or the equivalent of, the melancholic disease,” a misconception, he charged, that has grown out of their basic definition of melancholy “as a frenzy (*furor*) alienating us from

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, lib. IV, “Forza et potentia d’amore,” fols. 192^v–193^r.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, lib. II, “Dell’amore dell’huomo all’huomo,” fol. 152^r.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, lib. II, “Origine de gli affetti,” fol. 76^v.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, lib. II, “Dell’amor dell’huomo a Dio,” fol. 146^r.

our proper disposition.” Foolishly accepting this error of the physicians, Equicola added, was Cicero, who characterized love “as both frenzy and melancholy” in the pathological sense of those terms. Taking this view to task, Equicola argued that, on the contrary, “love is not a disease, nor can properly be called a disease, since disease is a disposition contrary to nature.”¹⁶⁶ So far as melancholy ensues from love’s yearnings, Equicola determined, it too properly belongs, not to category of pathology as treated by the physicians, but to the category of ecstasy and illumination as treated by the mystics and prophets.

So far, then, as symptoms of melancholy are found in association with the frenzied behavior of love, Equicola allowed that they are consignable to the category of disease only if they are the result of love’s corruption through its loss of legitimate spiritual purpose. This is not to say, however, that the medical texts were of inconsequence for Equicola in his adoption of this position, containing as they did valuable information and insights pertinent to his subject. Concerning one of the main signs of melancholy recognized by the physicians, for instance, that of the display of a lover’s sighs in conjunction with pallidness and tears, Equicola reflected that “when the lover is in a state of meditation, and immersed in thoughts about its desired object, in his wish to enjoy it his heart becomes filled with vexation.” Being frustrated in his desire to be united with his beloved, “his blood is thrown into some commotion, causing his vital spirits to fail in performing their proper office,” the result being that “his lung is unable, as it is accustomed, to exhale and inhale.”¹⁶⁷ A like analysis applied for Equicola to the penchant of lovers for dreaming, especially of a dark and depressing sort. As Avicenna helped Equicola to understand, “melancholy causes one to see in a dream, with vehement motion, sepulchres, black objects, and deformed creatures.” These and many other painful symptoms of love melancholy were brought out by Equicola to support his concession that melancholy can indeed result “from excessive love” (*da troppo amore*).¹⁶⁸

In its corrupt form Equicola believed that such melancholy, as the love from which it springs, can rightfully be termed a disease. In its

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, lib. II, “Diffinitione d’amore,” fol. 106^v.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, lib. IV, “Causa de’ sospiri, della pallidezza, & delle lagrime de gli amanti,” fol. 212^v.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. IV, “Cagione de’ sogni de gli amanti,” fol. 215^v.

exalted form, however, in association with that form of love which is able to incite the lover to live "beyond the law of nature" and "to surpass all mediocrity," melancholy assumed for Equicola a very different aspect. Following Ficino, he saw no contradiction in the proposition that philosophical love is simultaneously attuned to Venus and to Saturn. Concerning melancholy as such, Equicola accepted and reiterated the widespread astrological axiom that "the lord of this humor is Saturn, which planet is the investigator of things beyond nature."¹⁶⁹ However, as the astrologically conditioned medical tradition instructed Equicola, the "heroic" lover, if turned upward by Saturn, is amorously enkindled by Venus. The philosophical lover of God is no exception to this rule. Being quickened by Venus and borne into the spiritual heights by Saturn, "the highest and best philosopher is a lover of divine things." Or as Equicola also put this idea: "True philosophizing is the love of God."¹⁷⁰

If philosophy represented for Equicola one principal way to achieve amorous union with God, another way, for which Ficino also showed him the way, lay in magic. For this reason, observed Equicola, among the *amorosi* are to be found many whose principal studies "are magic, alchemy, and astrology (*la magica, l'alchimia, & la mathematica*)."¹⁷¹ In this regard, also, it was Equicola's intent to establish that the natural humor of melancholy is capable of performing a key role in the act of magical transformation, albeit not as its cause but as its effect. For the true instigating impulse of this magical transformation, Equicola insisted, lies not in a natural cause but in a supernatural one. Its ultimate source is God, Who is also, it happens, the sublime object to which the smitten lover is drawn.

In this way Equicola fell into common cause not only with those, on the most superficial of levels, seeking to turn the theme of love melancholy into a popular vogue. On a deeper level he also fell into common cause with those religious reformers of his age who, through love, sought to reforge their broken bonds with God. Thus, in addition to contributing to the vogue of love melancholy set in motion by Ficino's *De amore*, Equicola, belonging as much to the Reformation

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, lib. IV, "Causa che inclina ad amare più una persona che un'altra," fol. 175^v.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. VI, "Del fine d'amore," fol. 316^v.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, lib. IV, fol. 175^v.

as to the Renaissance, can be counted among those who sought to reconcile the Ficinian doctrine of melancholy genius with the deepest religious needs of his age coinciding with the drive for spiritual and ecclesiastical reform.

That clerical writers of this period as well as secular ones like Leone Ebreo and Equicola might be receptive to Ficino's reworked genial theory has already been evidenced in a figure like the scholarly Venetian Franciscan Francesco Giorgi. More directly turning Ficino's doctrine of melancholy genius to the express use of the religious reform movement than Giorgi, and in the process giving it broader Italian currency by expressing his ideas in the *volgare*, was the Milanese Dominican Battista da Crema (d. 1534). What is especially striking about Da Crema's principal contribution on this subject, the *Della cognitione et vittoria di se stesso* (1531), is that, though falling back on the more traditional theological framework for the assessment of mental alienation, the seven capital vices, he presented one of the age's rare attempts to correlate the vices with the humoral complexions described by the physicians.

* * *

As pointed out in the previous chapter, one vice above all, notably in a revised secular form lamented by Petrarca, was widely associated with the melancholy humor. This was *accidia*, which, after becoming filtered through the scholastics, had largely absorbed traits assigned by the early Christian monks to a closely related but separate vice or sorrow (*tristitia*). What strikes us as we peruse Da Crema's *Della cognitione* is that its author, determining that differences dividing *accidia* from sorrow were more decisive than the similarities uniting them, consciously chose to return to a pre-scholastic perspective on these vices corresponding to a comparable division between phlegm and melancholy among the bodily humors. For, he reasoned, while we might legitimately refer to a virtuously penitent form of sorrow spoken of by St. Paul as "sorrow seeking God" (*tristitia secundum Deum*), we are compelled to view any corresponding appeal to "sloth in search of God" (*acedia secundum Deum*) as an absurd contradiction in terms. In corresponding fashion, with Ficino his implicit guide, Da Crema furnished purgative sorrow with a fitting material ally in a combustible melancholy humor, leaving debilitating *accidia*, now reverting to its original monastic definition as "tedium or loathing in the

doing of good" (*tedio, ò fastidio del ben operare*), with nothing more dynamic in its service than incombustible phlegm.¹⁷²

As Da Crema's "spirit of *accidia*" put this identification between the vice and humor in no uncertain terms: "I am of a phlegmatic disposition, and am neither very agile nor mobile. . . . I am unable to complete a thing which has been begun."¹⁷³ But whereas Da Crema found the idea of *accidia* to be too encumbered with traits of enervation and lethargy to serve as a viable vicious analogue for melancholy, he did not feel so constrained concerning the vice of sorrow with which it had become conflated for so long because of its superficial resemblance. By re-establishing the original monastic separation between these vices, Da Crema was able to present a far more convincing option among the capital vices than listless *accidia* to meet the complex demands of Ficino's *furor melancholicus*. Thus, after taking leave of the vice of anger in the previous chapter, Da Crema noted that, "just as vicious wrath has the natural choleric complexion for its material cause, so does sorrow (*tristitia*) have its natural cause in the melancholy complexion of a man; hence, when we observe that one is very sad and of a sullen disposition, we say that he is melancholy."¹⁷⁴

Already in the previous pages of the *Della cognitione* Da Crema had made a strong case for exonerating the physiological humors from the condemnation he directed to the vices with which they are associated. As material causes, he ascertained, they are God-given endowments which may be used for good as readily as for ill. At the outset

¹⁷² Battista da Crema, *Opera utilissima, della cognitione et vittoria di se stesso* (Venice: Per Bartholomeo detto l'Imperadore et Francesco suo genero, 1548), lib. VII, cap. 3, fol. 136^v. This tract, first pub. at Milan in 1531, received two subsequent impressions: one at Rome in 1545 and this one at Venice in 1548. For assistance in acquiring a photocopy of this rare tract, belonging to the collection of the Austrian State Library in Vienna, I thank my friend Richard Laurence of Michigan State University. On Battista's life and career see Luigi Bogliolo, *La dottrina spirituale di Fra Battista da Crema, O.P.* (Torino: Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, 1952), with the suggestion of a possibly direct link between Battista and St. Caterina of Genoa, p. 110. For a fuller discussion of this subject see my article "Is Acedia Melancholy? A Re-examination of this Question in the Light of Fra Battista da Crema's *Della cognitione et vittoria di se stesso* (1531)," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 34 (1979), 180-99.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, lib. VII, cap. I, fol. 133^v.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, lib. VI, cap. 1, fol. 121^v. On the initial pre-Gregorian distinction between *acedia* and *tristitia*, see above, p. 53n. On the influence of the Florentine Platonists on Battista see Bogliolo, *Dottrina Spirituale*, p. 26.

of his treatment of the vice *tristitia* Da Crema made it clear that its material cause of melancholy is no exception to this rule. "It is not a vicious impiety before God," Da Crema declared in this regard, "if you are of a melancholy temperament." What constitutes a true vice is not the melancholy disposition of itself, but the failure of the melancholic to moderate the effects of his condition "in keeping with reason, just as a person ought to regulate choler and the other passions within himself."¹⁷⁵ It is, he insisted, only an unregulated form of melancholy that the demons readily manipulate in its notorious capacity as the Devil's bath, whereas, in its regulated form, melancholy is employable by the soul as an aid to resisting demonic incursions.

By thus conceding to an essentially neutral character of the melancholy humor, as subject to a gainful use as to a vicious abuse by the solitary contemplative, Da Crema had already largely distinguished himself from the bulk of Christian mystical writers. For whereas these, many of whom took their lead from the French mystic Gerson, tended to view the existence of melancholy in solitary contemplation as largely a necessary evil to be gradually expunged through a program of spiritual exercises, Da Crema maintained rather that melancholy can continue to behave as a constructive force for the mystic at the superior as well as at the inferior levels of spiritual ascent. Moreover, the impact of the Florentine Platonic revival on his thinking allowed him to carry this principle to another significant stage. For, like Ficino upon whom he drew, Da Crema perceived in melancholy an ambivalent nature permitting it to act both as a diabolically-instigated drag upon the soul and as a divinely-instigated spur to the soul ecstatically aspiring to achieve oneness with God. According to this way of thinking the form of penitent sorrow sanctioned by St. Paul as *tristitia secundum Deum*—that is, sorrow in pursuit of God, is alternatively expressible as *melancholia secundum deum*—melancholy in pursuit of God.

"And when I say that on no account ought we to be sad," Da Crema advised his readers in light of the Pauline distinction between two types of sorrow, "I always mean by this the wicked kind of sorrow, because one finds another kind of sorrow which is not blameworthy, which is not evil but good."¹⁷⁶ Though willing to grant that,

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 122^r.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 2, fol. 123^v.

when diabolically generated, sorrow prompts “a wicked act, operation, or habit through the corruption of an ill will,” Da Crema insisted that sorrow can also assume a propitious form provoking “a virtuous act and operation proceeding from a good will, which is the result of the displeasure a man feels by reason of his offenses against God.” Testifying to this dual character of sorrow, he pointed out, is Christ himself, who “declared that His soul was sorrowful unto death.” It followed for Da Crema that the humor serving as sorrow’s material cause is capable of the performing the same dual role. In and of itself melancholy “is neither a virtue nor a vice, but is a temperament aptly provided by God for our utility.”¹⁷⁷ It becomes a virtue or vice, he determined, by dint of the use to which it is put.

“I find some good and seemly qualities (*conditioni*) implanted by God in the melancholy and sad complexion,” Da Crema allowed in this regard, adding that “if we employ them in keeping with God’s will, they are optimally advantageous in inclining us to, and aiding us in, the performance of virtue.” Conversely, “if we do not moderate them according to the just measure of God, that which ought to be useful to us becomes transformed into a vice and spiritual injury.”¹⁷⁸ Melancholy, he judged, is something to be ashamed of only when it is turned to evil. At the other extreme it is fully justified when one afflicted by it is able to say with conviction: “I am sad and melancholic by nature, and as a result abhor evil as did Christ.”¹⁷⁹

As for the particular attributes of melancholy making it adaptable to a facilitation of the soul’s upward journey, Da Crema singled out two for special mention. The first lies in the encouragement of compunction on the part of one who is dominated by its ascendancy, a *sine qua non* of spiritual contrition, and the second, in its stimulation of one under its sway to seek solace in solitude from worldly distractions. In explication of the first of these attributes Da Crema maintained that the melancholic “is readily contrite, and weeps for his sins and for the sins of others, and also over the harsh afflictions of Christ, over the afflictions of his dear mother, and over all the afflictions of the saints. Thus he displays a tender and soft heart, is on the verge of tears, and is prepared for every kind of compunction.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 3, fol. 123^v.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 5, fol. 125^v.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, cap. 3, fol. 123^v.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, cap. 5, fol. 126^v.

As a result, Da Crema maintained, those under melancholy's sway "are easily moved by pity and compassion, and by virtue of this quality are greatly inclined to acts of piety which are so pleasing to God."¹⁸¹ More directly pertinent to our subject, however, is the second major attribute assigned by Da Crema to the black bile, the part he believed it to play in promoting a life of solitary contemplation.

"It is customarily observed," Da Crema pointed out, "that he who is saturnine and melancholic is unable to remain with other men, but rather always remains alone unto himself (*sopra di se stesso*)." That melancholy has a constructive role to play beyond merely impelling the mystic to take up a solitary domicile was also established by Da Crema, who invested it with the capacity to assist the laborious contemplative process carried out in solitude. By virtue of the "natural solitude" (*questa naturale solitudine*) induced by melancholy, Da Crema reported, "a man is easily able to give himself over to the meditation of things which are good and holy and . . . makes himself very diligent in the loftiness of sweet contemplation."¹⁸²

Consequently, pleaded Da Crema, far from lamenting his painful affliction, the melancholic contemplative should "give thanks to God, and exult in joy that He has given you a very suitable complexion and made you inclined to such good virtues." To the contrary of morosely fretting in response to his melancholic dolor, the suffering contemplative "should be joyful in Christ that you have the easy opportunity of fleeing, without resistance, all the worldly dissipations, triumphs, and pomp."¹⁸³ The essentially ambivalent character of melancholy was summarized by Da Crema in the maxim: "The saturnine is either an angel or a demon" (*Un saturnino overo è angelo, overo è un demonio*), a paradox prompting the admonition that, "you who are melancholy by nature, it is necessary that you be either an angel clothed with flesh or else it is necessary that you be a demon incarnate."¹⁸⁴

In one respect, however, the Dominican cleric Da Crema, who otherwise, through Ficino's mediation, shared a number of presuppositions about the marvelous powers of melancholy in common with his secular contemporary Equicola, took sharp departure from Equi-

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 126^r.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, fol. 126^v.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, cap. 8, fol. 130^r.

cola. For whereas Equicola held self-will to be consistent with a higher divine will, Da Crema more conventionally opposed self-will to the divine will, locating in the former (*la volontà di se stesso, la volontà propria*) a fit receptacle for the diabolical form of melancholy. "Present me with a man who is self-willed," Da Crema conceded at one pole of the will's pendulum swing, "and you will see him for the most part troubled, sad, and melancholy."¹⁸⁵ The reason for this, he explained, is that "the demon assigned to this disposition, melancholic and sad, delights in casting you down from that lofty place which you have already achieved, or else prevents you from attaining it, in so doing making you even more abject than is he himself."¹⁸⁶ That said, however, Da Crema did not construe his admonitions against melancholy-provoking self-will as an argument for eradicating melancholy altogether from the solitary mystic. Rather, he construed them as an argument for expropriating melancholy from the Devil's grasp and putting it to the service of God.

Granting that the diabolical, unregulated form of melancholy should be placed in the care of a physician, Da Crema also emphasized that, being rooted in a supernatural source existing in a realm beyond the competency of mere worldly physicians, only a spiritual physician among the theologians is adequate to the task.¹⁸⁷ But Da Crema also acknowledged the existence of a regulated form of melancholy sorrow which the sage spiritual physician will seek, not to eradicate, but to guide as an agent of spiritual progress. Such a wise physician will instruct his afflicted patient: "God has thus made you of such a sad and melancholy nature in order that you may moderate it by following reason, and in order that you may conquer over that melancholy by which, in failing to be moderated, many are overcome and drawn into various vices, excusing themselves afterwards by their melancholy nature."¹⁸⁸

Today the name of Battista da Crema is better known through various of his disciples playing key roles in the Catholic reform movement, including the founders of the Theatines and Barnabites, St. Gaetano de Thiene and St. Antonio Zaccharia respectively, than

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 9, fol. 130^v.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 8, fol. 130^r.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 10, fol. 131^{r-v}.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 5, fol. 127^r.

through his own few surviving works.¹⁸⁹ But such obscurity was not the case in his own day, when Battista's ascetic writings, led by the *Della cognitione*, were widely circulated before he posthumously ran afoul of the Roman Inquisition, in 1552, for suspected heterodox tendencies. Aiding Da Crema's cause in this regard was a reduction of the *Della cognitione* into a compendium by a disciple, Serafino da Fermo (= Aceti, 1496–1540), who also purged its offending articles causing the full text to be placed on the Index. In this way, even as Da Crema's name became eclipsed by time, his ideas, including that of favorable melancholy, continued to have a significant effect on subsequent Catholic mystical literature.¹⁹⁰

Of the advantages of melancholy for spiritual advancement brought out by Da Crema, Da Fermo singled out three for special mention. First of all, he noted, "the melancholic despises festivities, pomp, and ostentatious clothing, from which are born countless sins;" secondly, the melancholic, "by being timid of heart, is inclined to piety," as a result of which he is prompted "to exercise himself in pious works and in the meditation of Christ's passion, and in weeping for his own sins and for those of his neighbor;" and thirdly, the melancholic is disposed "to persevere with arduous effort in solitude, which, when duly attended, gives birth to the quiet of contemplation."¹⁹¹ In this way Da Fermo put to the use of the religious reform movement, in abbreviated form, a thesis that his mentor Battista da Crema

¹⁸⁹ Bogliolo, *Dottrina Spirituale*, pp. 8, 110 ff. Cf. Orazio Premoli, *Storia dei Barnabiti nel Cinquecento* (Rome: Desclée & C., 1913), pp. 4–5, 13, and Pierre Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, trans. W.H. Mitchell et al., 4 vols. (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1953–55), III, 230 ff.

¹⁹⁰ Da Fermo reduced the 222 folios in the original 1531 edition of the *Della cognitione* to 25 folios. On Battista's problems with the Index see Bogliolo, *Dottrina Spirituale*, pp. 10–14. See also p. 18, pointing out how the wider popularity of the *Della cognitione* was facilitated by its trans. into Spanish by the Castilian Dominican Melchior Cano as *Tratado de la victoria de si mismo* (n.p., 1550), repr. in *Biblioteca de autores españoles*, LXV (Madrid: 1873), pp. 301–24. Cf. French trans. by M. Legendre, *La victoire sur soi-même* (Paris: 1923). On Serafino see Gabriele Feyles, *Serafino da Fermo, Canonico Regolare Lateranense (1496–1540): La Vita, le Opere, la Dottrina Spirituale* (Torino: Scuole Tipografica Salessiana di Torino, 1942).

¹⁹¹ Serafino da Fermo, *Trattato per la vita Christiana utilissimo, della cognitione & vittoria di se stesso*, cap. 6, in *Opere spirituali, alla Christiana perfettione, utilis. & necessarie* (Piacenza: Appresso Francesco Coti, 1570), p. 347. A Latin ed. of Da Fermo's spiritual writings, including this compendium, appeared the same year as *Opuscula, ad vitae perfectionem apprime facientia* (Piacenza: Apud Vincentium, 1570). As pointed out by Feyles, *Serafino da Fermo*, pp. 59–60, Da Fermo's 1541 and 1548 editions of this compendium also contained an apology on behalf of Battista da Crema.

had spelled out more expansively, to wit, that melancholy, while subject to demonic manipulation, can also act as a suitable material expedient for the contemplative liberation of the soul from its demonically infested domicile.

* * *

While the foregoing early Renaissance contributors to the vogue of melancholy genius initiated by Ficino for the most part were positively disposed to an amalgamation of its Peripatetically derived naturalist and Platonically derived supernaturalist components, others receptive to one or the other of the two genial theories, increasing in number as the sixteenth century advanced, detected cracks and crevices in the conceptual edifice erected by Ficino foreboding its collapse. The question raised on one side of this tense balancing act is why Plato's heavenly sent frenzies are in need of assistance by a suspect humor like melancholy, and on the other side, why a humor praised by Aristotle as intrinsically capable of prompting rare mental insights has need of divinely sent infusions.

That certain exponents of the Platonic inspiration theory cited above, such as Vida, Fuscano, and Castiglione, did not feel a corresponding need to bring the Aristotelian melancholy theory to bear on their speculations does not of itself signify the rupture of the Ficinian compromise. Neither, however, does it help to buttress that compromise. On the opposite side, exponents of the Aristotelian theory of melancholy, among whom the late quattrocento physiognomist and chiromancer Bartolomeo Cocles (= della Rocca, 1467–1504) can be taken as an example, did not always feel the need to refer melancholy genius to a higher supernatural cause. Thus, in keeping with the Galenic adage that “the soul follows the complexion of the body,” Cocles in his *Anastasis* (= *Awakening*) remarked on the irony that foolish men are often able to divine the future more accurately than those not so disposed “on account of the impressions caused by the melancholy humors.”¹⁹² While Cocles did not expressly reject the possibility of a supernatural instigator behind such melancholic “impressions,” he also did not make a case for a supernatural instigator.

¹⁹² Bartolomeo Cocles (= della Rocca), *Chyromantie ac physionomie anastasis*. . . (Bologna: Per Joannem Antonium Platonidem Benedictorum, 1504), lib. III, cap. 1, fol. 87^v. On Cocles see Thorndike, *Magic*, V, ch. 4, pp. 50 ff.

The fissures perceptible in resonations of the Ficinian genial theory like these, it will now be our aim to show, became more manifestly visible as Renaissance Aristotelianism carved out an independent theory of genius having more in common with a Hippocratic-Galenic medical diagnosis of melancholy than with the a Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy. Contrary to a common misconception of Renaissance scholarship, the medieval Aristotelian tradition did not simply peter out in the Renaissance to become replaced by Platonism. On the contrary, Aristotelianism itself experienced a distinct revival paralleling that of Platonism. Much as Florence served as a seat for a resurgent Plato during the Italian Renaissance, Padua served as a seat for a resurgent Aristotle. A shift in emphasis concerning the basic constituents of genius by this school, from supernatural to natural causation, eventually resulted in a shift in kind, with the thesis in its most extreme form, for which Pomponazzi will be shown to constitute its most famous spokesman, dispensing of the Platonic frenzies altogether in favor of an exclusively naturalist explanation of genius.

A further cause for the rending of Ficino's synthesized version of human genius, we will also bring into view, lay at the opposite pole from the kind of naturalist approach to the subject presented by the Paduan Aristotelians. This threat to the Ficinian genial theory, encouraged by developments relating to the Savonarolan movement centered in post-Laurentian Florence, took the form of a skeptical rejection of all systematic attempts to answer the problem of genius altogether. While the key figure of this endeavor, Giovanni Pico's nephew Gianfrancesco, will be shown to target Aristotle as his main object of disdain, by widening the scope of his criticism beyond Aristotle to dogmatic philosophy in general, he will also be seen to cast doubt on the philosophical principles of Plato as well. Making this repudiation of the Platonic revival easier for Gianfrancesco, we will see, was what he considered to be the corruptive mingling of its supernaturalist principles with Aristotelian naturalist ones, with the idea of a divinely inspired melancholy prophet epitomizing for him the kinds of absurdities into which this hybrid philosophical mixture compels the mind.

As will also be pointed out, moreover, it was not only the formal kind of radical naturalism espoused by Pomponazzi and the formal kind of Pyrrhonian skepticism advocated by Gianfrancesco Pico that were to work their dissolutive effects on the Ficinian genial doctrine. Also contributing to that disintegrative tendency was a kind of prag-

matic skepticism arising out of the clinical applications of medical theory for which the Arab Avicenna was often cited as an authority. What united the members of this non-formal skeptical school was not a set philosophical theory, but a pragmatic methodology akin to modern scientific method. Generally trained in medicine in combination with their philosophical and theological studies, the proponents of this *operational* version of skepticism were of a mind to subjugate the search for final causes to more immediate material and efficient causes.

To the extent that this operationally skeptical approach to the question of the origin of genius can be said to have found a more reliable philosophical accomplice in formal philosophical theory, however, it was in Aristotle more than Plato that it found its most amenable collaborator, especially in the radically naturalist version of Pomponazzi. While the nature-based observations of Galenic medicine could conceivably be enlisted on either side of the Renaissance debate over the origin of genius, their practical effect, by encouraging an attitude of skepticism toward the claim that genius is instigated by supernatural causes, was to give more support to the naturalist than to the supernaturalist side in this controversy. In time such medical skepticism would merge with the methodical skepticism of scientific revolutionaries such as Galileo and Descartes to help bring an eventual end to the witch-craze.¹⁹³ For that to happen, however, as Pomponazzi already helped to point the way, a further collaboration would need to take place on the part of Renaissance medicine. This is the collaboration between medicine and an Aristotelian philosophy radically sundered from the supernaturalist preconceptions of Plato.

The cutting edge of this question will be shown to be the debate over the causes of witchcraft and sorcery. Applied to the witch question, the disposition of this school of thought was to maintain that accused witches and black magicians, whose genial powers are philosophically demonstrated to be a product of natural melancholy rather than of supernaturally demonic powers, are more in need of curing than of killing. As has been established, however, the witch issue was not all that was at stake in the philosophical controversy. Also at stake, at the opposite end of the genial spectrum, was the kind

¹⁹³ See, e.g., Trevor-Roper, *European Witch-Craze*, pp. 168 ff.

of genius claimed by the Platonists to be instilled by God. For if, as the radical naturalists maintained, demonic genius could be reduced to melancholy alienation, so could the genius declared by the Platonists to be the mark of alienated mystics, prophets, poets, and philosophers.

Following the conjunctive form of logic that Ficino adopted from the Thomistic legacy: just as faith seeks rational understanding, so does supernaturally inspired genius seek a natural auxiliary in the melancholy humor. Following a disjunctive form of logic which increasingly took hold in the post-Ficino period, however, two philosophical propositions were contraposed that had the effect of undermining the theory of melancholy genius formulated by Ficino. The first proposition flowed from the presumption that genial endeavor does not necessarily require the direct intrusion into the human psyche of a divine agent, and the second, conversely, that an intrusion into the human psyche of a divine agent does not necessarily require the assistance of a natural agent such as melancholy. In this sense Ficino's own favored mythical image of the Scylla and Charybdis took on new meaning, with his concept of melancholy genius wending a perilous path between those who rejected it altogether in the name of civic responsibility and rational moderation and those who subverted it by detaching and opposing to one another its naturalist and supernaturalist components.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ARISTOTELIAN AND SKEPTICAL REVIVALS AND THEIR DISINTEGRATIVE IMPACT ON THE FICINIAN GENIAL THEORY

A. *The Averroist Restatement of the Ficinian Genial Doctrine*

“Some inclined to melancholy,” the Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro the Younger (1453–1493) once wrote, “are favored in their grasp of the arts” (*Alii . . . declinans ad melancholicam, magis idonei sunt ad percipiendas artes*).¹ In further elucidation of this thesis Barbaro, a personal acquaintance of Ficino and Pico who was contemporaneously lecturing at the University of Padua, also let it be known that natural melancholy, while serving as an important component of artistic genius, is only one ingredient among several. “When we speak of human actions and events which befall men,” Barbaro observed, “we should consider in particular six concurrent causes: the will of man, the temperaments, the stars, God, the Devil, and external force.”² Barbaro’s express object in this writing, addressed to the subject of fate, was to reaffirm the God-given efficacy of the first of these causes of human activity, free will, in its endeavor to overcome the other five causes exerting external sway over the human soul. But Barbaro’s assertion of multiple causation in the effectuation of human activity also points up another lesson of his outlook which he shared with his Florentine friends. This is that natural as well as supernatural causation should be considered in our speculations about human behavior, including such extraordinary behavior as is associated with human genius. Notably agreeing in this regard with Pico’s famous attack on judicial astrology, declaring that “never should all events be referred to the stars,”³ Barbaro also accepted the corresponding view of both Ficino and Pico that the planets are able to

¹ Ermolao Barbaro, *Naturalis scientiae totius compendium, ex Aristotele, & aliis philosophis . . .* (Basel: Apud Christianum Egenolphum, 1550), lib. II: “De fato,” fol. 135^r.

² *Ibid.*, fols. 134^v–135^r.

³ *Ibid.*, fol. 134^v.

play, if not a determinative role in the lives of men, at least a participatory role. More specifically, with respect to the genius question, Barbaro allowed that planetary Saturn, together with humoral melancholy under its aegis, is competent to instill occult genial powers in the soul in cooperation with God and the Devil.

Barbaro has been credited by a number of Renaissance scholars with leading the way in its early cinquecento stages to a revival of Aristotle at Padua corresponding to the revival of Plato at Florence, an important facet of which consisted of a resolve to recover and interpret Aristotle in the Greek original.⁴ If, however, Barbaro's query into the origin of human genius can serve us as an index, his Aristotelian principles proved to be far from impervious to infiltration by the Florentine Platonic revival. The ground that Barbaro's Aristotle shared with Plato, as it happened, had a far longer history than that upheld by Ficino's Florentine circle, having been antecedently espoused by followers of the the medieval Arab interpreter of Aristotle, Averroës (= Ibn-Rushd, 1126–1198). For the Averroist belief in a transcendent world-soul, as surely as Ficino's belief in individual immortality, ultimately depended on a Platonic supernaturalist overview.⁵ On the basis of this shared philosophical ground the Averroists allowed, in agreement with with the Platonists, that not only wicked demons are

⁴ On Barbaro's philological interests, with a concentration on Aristotelian moral philosophy, see Garin, *Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 71–2, and Copenhaver and Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 170–71. On the Paduan naturalist traditions see esp. John Herman Randall, Jr., *The School of Padua and the Emergence of Modern Science* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1961), and *Career of Philosophy*, esp ch. 11, pp. 284 ff., and Antonino Poppi, ed. *Scienza e Filosofia all'Università di Padova nel Quattrocento* (Padua: Edizioni Lint, 1983). On the general Aristotelian revival, paralleling that of the Florentine Platonic revival, see Charles Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983).

⁵ See, e.g., Di Napoli, *L'Immortalità*, pp. 179 ff., and Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, esp. pp. 53–5 and 68 ff. As observed by Kristeller, *Sources*, p. 39, the term "Averroism" as applied to a version of Aristotelianism filtered through the commentaries of the Arab scholar Averroës has become so broadly and generally used by scholars as to make it highly "ambiguous and controversial." Indeed, in a lecture pub. as "Paduan Averroism and Alexandrism in the Light of Recent Studies," *Atti del XII Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia*, IX (1960), 147–55 (at p. 152), Kristeller has advised that the term be dropped altogether as overly vague. However, in this study, quite apart from specific doctrines often associated with Averroism such as that of a universal soul, we will employ the term in keeping rather with Randall's interpretation of Averroism, as indicated in his *Career of Philosophy*, I, who notes, p. 54, that Averroës' Aristotelianism, heavily relying as it did on the Neoplatonic Hellenistic commentators, was also considerably infused with Neoplatonic mystical (viz., supernaturalist) doctrines.

able to utilize the melancholy humor to mediate their entrance into, and interaction with, the human mind, but also God and His holy angels. Their central point of disagreement rested on the question of whether the soul, melancholically afflicted or not, is individually immortal or is ultimately absorbed into an eternally all-embracing universal soul.

Sometimes, it is true, as illustrated by the earlier cited Paduan physician Alessandro Achillini, melancholy could be construed by its Averroist observers more as an unwanted but necessary effect of the scholarly life than as an a dynamic fomenter of that life. In this regard Achillini's acknowledgment that scholars are more prone to melancholic vexation than the usual run of men, like the comparable observation made earlier by Alberti when broaching on the same subject, resembles more a plaint than an exultation.⁶ But if Achillini was reticent as to whether melancholy could play an active role in encouraging literary scholarship, as opposed to a reluctantly suffered effect, his Paduan colleague Agostino Nifo (1473–1538) was not. As a foremost Renaissance proponent of the doctrine of immortality—in the first instance of a universal kind following a strict Averroist conception and subsequently of an individual kind to bring it into conformity with the version made dogma by the Lateran Council of 1512,⁷ Nifo was also at the forefront of those upholding the existence of malevolent demons and their ability, through the imagination, to impinge on the human behavior; as put by Nifo in his *De demonibus*, “demons move our phantasy.” The demonic spirits, Nifo maintained in this connection, “are able to use the organs of our phantasy, in the same way that a sailor uses his ship, not by directly moving the phantasy, but by moving the organs in control of the phantasy.”⁸ Like many other demonological theorists of his age, moreover, Nifo presumed that the demons did not work their deleterious ways without

⁶ See above, p. 58. On Achillini, an early teacher of Pomponazzi, see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 136–37.

⁷ See, e.g., Agostino Nifo, *De immortalitate animae libellus* (Venice: Imprensa heredum quondam Bomini Octaviani Scoti Modoetiensis ac sociorum, 1521). For a contemporary assessment of Nifo's Averroist credentials, including his adoption of the world-soul theory following his Averroist teacher Nicoletto Vernia (1420–1499), see Edward Mahoney, “Philosophy and Science in Nicoletto Vernia and Agostino Nifo,” in Poppi, ed. *Scienza e Filosofia*, pp. 135 ff., esp. p. 91. But on Nifo's subsequent rejection of the Averroist world-soul doctrine, thereby bringing his view into line with what would become the officially sanctioned doctrine of individual immortality, see p. 201.

⁸ Nifo, *De demonibus* (Padua, 1492; Venice: 1503, 1527), cap. 12, fol. 74r.

help from nature, in particular finding the melancholy humor—the infamous “bath of the Devil”—to be especially advantageous for their needs. Accordingly, Nifo judged, Aristotle’s humoral explanation for demonic alienation should not be viewed as a natural alternative, but rather as complementary, to Plato’s supernaturalist explanation.

Further reflecting a typical misogynist bias of the demonological traditions, Nifo maintained that women, being more subject than men to widely volatile swings of a melancholy imagination, offer up pungent evidence of how demons are able to manipulate human behavior. Melancholy women, together with children and brutes, he noted, sometimes are observed to perform marvelous feats that cannot be explained except by assuming additional demonic ingress into their troubled minds; more particularly, “women are seen to speak by means of various languages and to employ diverse sciences, and young boys to teach or narrate marvelous arts, and brutes to speak, and male infants in swaddling clothes to reveal the future.”⁹ Persuaded that such astounding behavior exceeded the possibilities of nature alone, Nifo declared that “the above-mentioned do these things, not principally by themselves, but by means of a demon that moves and uses the organs of their phantasy, in the same manner that art uses its instruments. And this, without doubt, is called demonic possession, and through this women are called demoniacs.” While at the same time mindful that Aristotle referred these same symptoms to “an abundance of the melancholy humor” (*ex humoris melancholici abundantia*), Nifo was convinced that this explanation, without reference to further causes proceeding from a realm existing beyond the natural one, “is not adequate or sufficient to account for so many marvels which are continuously reported.”¹⁰ Demonic intervention in the affairs of human beings, Nifo believed, is not carried out independently of physical nature, but through natural mediation, the foremost manifestation of which is melancholy.

Revisiting this subject in a commentary on Aristotle’s *De somno et vigilia*, Nifo revealed that the Aristotle to which he paid homage was not one discoverable in his authenticated Greek texts, but rather one filtered through Ficino. The context in which this distinction is brought to light is a criticism by Nifo of Avicenna, who, he observed, in

⁹ *Ibid.* On the misogynist inclinations of the witch-hunters see esp. Cohn, *Inner Demons*, pp. 248–51. Concerning the key role of the *Malleus maleficarum* in promoting misogyny see the translated passages in Kors and Peters, ed. *Witchcraft*, pp. 114 ff.

¹⁰ Nifo, *De demonibus*, cap. 112, fol. 74’.

referring to the belief that demons are able to enter into and influence dreams, “understood by demonic the melancholy humor.” This opinion by Avicenna, Nifo conceded, “seems to be agreeable with what Aristotle taught,” the reason being that Aristotle, “who did not have acquaintance with demons, denied that dreams can come from God, but assigned them to the melancholy humor.”¹¹ It is no wonder, then, Nifo charged, that certain current followers of Aristotle and Avicenna, led by Pomponazzi, were making the same mistake by confounding secondary natural with primary supernatural causes of demonically inspired behavior. As stated in Nifo’s *De demonibus*, demonic influences “are not contrary to natural reason, but stand above natural reason (*non tamen sunt contra rationem naturalem, sed supra rationem naturalem*).”¹² And this, Nifo declared, is an opinion that “not only the theologians bequeath to us, but also the astrologers and all the Platonists.”¹³

If Nifo had stopped there his legacy would consist of little more than one of providing a philosophical rationale for the witch persecutions. Happily, again with Ficino his guide, he did not stop there, furnishing posterity with a rationale not only for demonically instilled genius, but also for its divinely instilled counterpart, together with a solitary way of life charged by its civic critics with abetting melancholy alienation. Thus, while agreeing with the Aristotelian maxim declaring the human being to be by nature a social animal, and with another Aristotelian maxim declaring a person of solitude to be either a god or a beast, Nifo read these maxims through a Platonic prism, maintaining that Aristotle thereby intended to point up the natural limitations of social engagement. Admittedly, Nifo granted along expected Aristotelian lines, “civil society, which is contrary to both divine and human solitude, is a thing natural to man. For man is by nature a social and civic animal.”¹⁴ However, in conjunction with this maxim, Aristotle was also enlisted by Nifo to caution that solitary seclusion, the contrary of civic affability, can as readily produce a superterrestrial as a bestial creature.

¹¹ Nifo, *Parva naturalia* (Venice: Apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1550), fol. 84^r.

¹² Nifo, *De demonibus*, cap. 21, fol. 75v.

¹³ *Ibid.*, cap. 12, fol. 74^r.

¹⁴ Nifo, *Liber de iis, qui apte possunt in solitudine vivere ad Augustinum Pastineum Perifonensem*, in *Prima pars opusculorum . . . in quinque libros . . .* (Venice: Apud Petrum de Nicolinis de Sabio, 1535), p. 80. Also found in *Opuscula moralia et politica* (Paris: Sumptibus Poleti le Duc, 1645), pars III, pp. 105 ff.

“The solitary,” wrote Nifo following Peripatetic guidelines, “leads a two-fold life, one in accordance with the human condition and one above man (*supra hominem*), through which he lives in the intellect.”¹⁵ Moreover, following Nifo’s interpretation of the same guidelines, there exists not one kind of solitary only, but two kinds, both existing “beyond nature” (*praeter naturam*). Dwelling at a level *below* social intercourse is a ferine or bestial kind of solitary to which the demons are attracted, whereas dwelling at a level *above* social intercourse is a kind of solitary Aristotle “calls a god, we call divine, a hero, or heroic, and Plato calls holy.”¹⁶ The affliction of melancholy, Aristotle had informed Nifo, enters this picture as readily in conjunction with one, as with the other, of the solitary modes.

It followed for Nifo that, just as we can distinguish between two forms of solitude, so can we distinguish between two forms of melancholy attracted to solitude. The first, he proffered, is bestial melancholy, termed *cucubrit* by the Arab physicians, provoking its sufferers, among its many scourges, “to flee inhabited places and to dwell in deserted and solitary places;” admittedly, he acknowledged, this form of solitary melancholy “is contrary to the heroic virtue.”¹⁷ But a divine kind of melancholy is also discernible, he continued, corresponding to the divine kind of solitude to which it is attracted. Not only solitary heroes of old like Hercules, Lysander, Ajax, and Bellerophon were afflicted by this “disease,” Nifo had gleaned from pseudo-Aristotle’s *Problemata*, but also solitaries of a less physically active disposition like Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato among the philosophers “and the majority of the poets.”¹⁸

In its beneficial form, Nifo asserted, melancholy is “the nourishment of prudence” (*prudentialiae pabulum*). While freely acknowledging that melancholy in its original cold form tends to degenerate into phlegmatic-like languor and lethargy, Nifo was equally of the opinion that, when heated to the right temperature it can render those under its domination “highly aroused, ingenious, affectionate, and prone to great fervor and desire.” Melancholy, Nifo contended, is depraved only when the object sought is depraved, whereas when the object of pursuit is noble, so is the resulting melancholy noble.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75 (*Opuscula moralia*, p. 116).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75 (*Opuscula moralia*, p. 117).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88 (*Opuscula moralia*, p. 134).

In bringing out the latter, favorable aspect of the black bile, Nifo, in Ficino's footsteps, praised it not only for its role in promoting extraordinary prowess of will and intellect, but also for prompting those under its beneficent influence "to seek out solitary places" for the further cultivation of that prowess.¹⁹

As in the case of Ficino, Nifo detected one of the more persuasive testimonies to a favorable interpretation of melancholy in its potential for spurring accurate prophecy. Energetically contesting the proposition put forth by some that, in his presentation of the divinatory power of melancholy, Aristotle referred only to an inferior form of natural prophecy, Nifo answered that the *princeps philosophorum* "admired true prophets, and in his book *De somno et vigilia* did not deny the same when he declared that they exceed our tiny minds (*eos esse supra capitulum nostrum*)."²⁰ Nor for that matter, Nifo further insisted, can all false prophecy be reduced to a mere natural event, since lying behind it might well be a demonic cause. In both forms of prophecy, demonic and divine, he contended along Ficinian lines that melancholy is able to act as a mediating *causa materialis*. If, he speculated, natural melancholy can be called into the service of prophesying demons, it can just as readily be called into the service of the revelatory illuminations dubbed the prophetic frenzy by Plato.

Much as Nifo, following Ficino, discerned internal affiliation between Aristotle's theory of melancholy genius and the Platonic mystical and prophetic frenzies, so did he do the same with respect to the Platonic frenzy of love. "Intense meditation upon the beloved," wrote Nifo, "perpetually seizes the lover, casting him into ecstasy, that is, into alienation."²¹ What Plato characterized as a divinely sent frenzy of love, according to Nifo, was alternatively characterized by Aristotle in the terminology of the medical writers; more particularly, lovers, "as Aristotle stated, become melancholics, thereupon losing sleep and envisaging terrible things."²² And what, we ask, is the physiological explanation for such melancholic insomnia and its accompanying hallucinations? "Melancholy," Nifo answered, "is produced from dry, thick, and dark blood, which fills the head with its vapors, dries the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88 (*Opuscula moralia*, p. 134).

²⁰ Nifo, *Liber de iis, qui apte possunt in solitudine vivere*, in *Prima pars opusculorum*, p. 87.

²¹ Nifo, *De amore* [bound with *De pulchro*] (Leiden: Apud Davidem Lopes de Haro, 1641), cap. 94, p. 280. First ed., 1529.

²² *Ibid.*, cap. 79, p. 241.

brain, and both day and night incessantly stirs the soul with gloomy and dreadful images."²³ For this reason, as Nifo reiterated a common theme of the literature of love, melancholy lovers "sigh in their pains and sorrows, living and being busied, not in their own bodies, but in the body of another."²⁴

That it was not only Ficino who significantly entered into Nifo's rendition of love melancholy is evidenced by an approbatory reference to Equicola, who, Nifo observed, had previously composed a "very fertile" treatment of the subject.²⁵ This compliment aside, however, revealing his preference for Ficino's dichotomized version of the passion of love over Equicola's homogenous one, Nifo took exception to Equicola's opinion that all love is inherently self-love.²⁶ This is not to say, however, that Nifo uncritically accepted Ficino's version of love melancholy either. By Nifo's reckoning Ficino, by exalting the visual and auditory senses at the expense of the so-called concupiscible senses of touch, smell, and taste, had inadvertently weakened his case for melancholy genius by eradicating from its syndrome some of its more conspicuous ingredients. Thus, after citing Ficino's bifurcated doctrine of love frenzy in which the senses of touch, taste, and smell appear to have more in common with the bestial realm located at the bottom of the ladder of love than with the divine realm at the top, Nifo declared it to be "multifariously absurd."²⁷

For Nifo the sensual gratifications of Venus were to be found as fully at the heights as at the depths of the amatory ascent to God. Love making use of only sight and hearing, Nifo countered Ficino, pursues beauty by intention only (*sola intentionali fruitione*), whereas the concupiscible senses of touch, smell, and taste, on the other hand, deemed by Ficino to occupy a place on the ladder of love inferior to sight and hearing, enjoys beauty in actuality (*hic vero reali*).²⁸ "For which reason," Nifo concluded, "the love of enjoying human beauty will not be possible without venereal desire and sensual love" (*Quare nec amor fruendi pulchri humani esse poterit absque desiderio Veneris, cupidoque amore*).²⁹ Therefore it is not by chance, Nifo pointed out, that

²³ *Ibid.*, cap. 96, p. 283.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 1, p. 1. On Equicola see above, pp. 137 ff.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 106: "De ordine hujus amoris." On this rejection of Equicola's egotistic conception of love by Nifo see Musaccio, "Role of Senses in . . . Equicola . . .," in Beecher and Ciavolella, *Eros and Anteros*, p. 93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 15, p. 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the ancient poets had placed Cupid among the gods.³⁰ "Every appetite is a form of love," Nifo corrected Ficino, "and love is nothing else but an appetite for the enjoyment of a beloved object."³¹ Just as Nifo saw the senses as participating in the pleasures of divine love, he saw them as being a party to its pain, with its prominent result being melancholy.

At the same time, being cognizant that melancholy could work to the detriment as well as to the benefit of love's upward journey, Nifo felt it urgent to admonish the lover against being lured into such conditions as might attract demonic, as distinct from divine, influences. From this standpoint Nifo urged the lover to reject, among such demonically conducive conditions, all forms of idleness, so that, as counseled by St. Jerome, "the Devil will always find you occupied."³² Love, according to this outlook, is the invigorating antithesis of idleness, in which capacity it typically acts as an efficacious remedy to the Devil's ills. But a debilitating insufficiency of love was not the only condition Nifo envisaged as being conducive to demonic encroachment. Equally conducive in his mind was a form of amatory passion turned, not to God, but to worldly objects. As the demonological traditions to which he subscribed had instructed Nifo, it is by virtue of such illicit love that the Devil, with assistance from the melancholy humor, is wont to plant images of sexually enticing succubi and incubi in the human mind so that it might be seduced from its divine goal.

While formally associating himself with the Aristotelian rather than the Platonic traditions, then, Nifo, the technical disagreement over the relative stature of the senses apart, demonstrated overall agreement with the leading voice of the Florentine Platonists, Ficino, on a fundamental presupposition of his genial theory. The genial powers of man, Nifo maintained, while able to make effective use of a natural agent like melancholy, are ultimately referable to a cause transcending nature. The basic choice of alternatives for Nifo, as for Ficino, did not crystallize as one between a natural and supernatural origin of melancholy genius. It rather crystallized as one between demonically and divinely driven melancholy genius.

Even as Averroistically disposed Aristotelians like Nifo endorsed the Ficinian genial theory, however, they also at times, by laying

³⁰ *Ibid.*, cap. 94, p. 281.

³¹ *Ibid.*, cap. 73, p. 223.

³² *Ibid.*, cap. 99, p. 300.

greater stress on its natural than supernatural constituents, helped to sharpen an underlying discrepancy between them. This discrepancy became all the more glaring as two separate but related philological developments fell into place, facilitated, in both cases, by the addition of Greek to Latin in the humanist linguistic arsenal. The first development is the acquisition of greater knowledge about what Aristotle's beliefs actually were, as distinct from paraphrases of his views handed down by his medieval interpreters, and the second development, the increasingly important role that the nature-based ancient commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. 200) came to play on the contemporary interpretation of Aristotle to counteract the Platonically compromised interpretation of the Averroists.

While most cogently and forcefully articulated by Pomponazzi, a more radically nature-based, or "Alexandrist," approach to the subject of genius, we will now establish, was also discernible in the earlier quattrocento Paduan ambience within which Pomponazzi formulated his ideas. The proponents of this approach can be said to have presented it as a special case of the application of "Ockham's razor," declaring, following a logical guideline transmitted to them from an English Aristotelian of an earlier time, that explanations for a given phenomenon should not to be multiplied beyond necessity (*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*).³³ In accordance with this guideline these will be shown to assert that natural melancholy is alone sufficient to explain the phenomenon of human genius without adjoining to it the more remote causes of either demonic or divine intervention.

B. *The Naturalist Reaction: The Antecedents*

Inquiring in his *De doctrina promiscua* as to what philosophers have in common with lovers, Galeotto Marzio da Narni (1427–1497) answered that philosophers and lovers alike act as if they are dead while they are still living. The reason? As explained by Marzio, philosophers

³³ The lack of homogeneity in the Aristotelian revival is suggested by Schmitt's lead-off chapter of his *Aristotle*, "Renaissance Aristotelianisms," pp. 10 ff. We can presume that it is to the Alexandrist form of Aristotelianism in particular that Clark, *Thinking of Demons*, alludes (e.g., pp. 243, 263) with his notion "Aristotelian purism" in reference to Pomponazzi, thereby distinguishing it from conventional scholastic Aristotelianism in the Thomistic tradition. On Ockham's razor see also above, p. 13.

and lovers share the trait that, though trapped in their bodies, they yearn to be united with an object of attraction lying outside their bodies. A common symptom shared by both, he pointed out, is a kind of paralysis of action, a condition exacerbated by the presence of melancholy.

“By definition as set forth by Plato,” wrote Marzio, “love is the desire to enjoy beauty.” However, as Plato also indicated and Cicero reaffirmed, “beauty is shown to be two-fold, of the body and of the soul,”³⁴ as such provoking two separate but interrelated responses by the lover: one consisting of a kind of inner ecstasy and the other, of external symptoms of melancholy. The quest for spiritual beauty can no more evade the necessity of a physiological reaction, Marzio insisted, than can the corresponding quest for corporeal beauty. Working in tandem with the motion of the soul called “thinking” (*cogitatio*) is an equally vigorous motion of the body, to wit, “a movement from tenuous fluids dispersed throughout parts of the head, which in turn are moved by spirits flowing back and forth in the act of thinking.”³⁵ The result, Marzio asserted, characterized by a combination of fear and sorrow, is the physiological condition labeled melancholy by the physicians.

Accordingly, Marzio maintained, the philosophical lover of God, by sharing a sense of ecstatic alienation with the mystical lover of God, also shares his melancholy. Such melancholy, however, Marzio exhorted, is not something that is necessarily to be dreaded; indeed, he granted with Aristotle his authority, it may well prove to be more of a blessing than a curse to its sufferer. “As Aristotle gives the reasons in his *Problemata* of why melancholics are more acute of genius,” he explained, “melancholy is sometimes the kindling-wood of wisdom (*melancholia est aliquando sapientiae fomes*).”³⁶

So far the genial theory upheld by Marzio in his *De doctrina promiscua* does not appear to be far removed from that contemporaneously being espoused by Ficino. A closer look at his text will verify, however, that the philosophical continuum to which Marzio’s genial theory belongs leads, not to a synthesis of nature and supernature in

³⁴ Galeotto Marzio da Narni, *De doctrina promiscua liber* (Florence: Apud Laurentium Torrentinum, 1548), cap. 20: “De philosophis qui viventes eunt mortui,” p. 175. On Marzio see Thorndike, *Magic*, IV, 399 ff., and Giancarlo Zanier, “Ricerche sull’Occultismo a Padova nel Secolo XV,” in Poppi, ed. *Scienza e Filosofia*, pp. 365 ff.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 13, p. 111.

the Ficinian manner, but to a dissolution of that synthesis in the manner subsequently assumed by Pomponazzi. Though paying lip service to Plato and to his early Christian interpreter Augustine by the concession that the philosopher, through the “death” of his body, becomes “a friend to God” and is transformed into “the likeness of God,” Marzio had a very different intention than one of seconding their supernaturalist assumptions.

The fundamental axiom underlying Marzio’s query into the origin of human genius is revealed in his maxim that “where there is no body, there is no human life” (*Ubi autem non est corpus, non est humana vita*). By neglecting his bodily needs in favor of loftier spiritual ideals, asserted Marzio, the philosopher, regardless of what he might believe to the contrary, confirms rather than contradicts the essential dependency of the mind on the body. Given, therefore, that the passions, including the passion of love, “are annexed to the body,” Marzio wrote, it follows that “to live is to use the body and seek its advantage.”³⁷

The epistemological corollary of the brand of radical naturalism espoused by Marzio, at the opposite pole from the Platonic view of a superworldly origin of human knowledge, is one of radical empiricism, summarized in the widely disseminated adage, popularly but inaccurately attributed to Aristotle, that “there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses” (*Nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*).³⁸ A further corollary, pitting Aristotle against Plato rather than putting them into a common cause, is that the so-called “kindling wood of wisdom,” melancholy, being as “annexed to the body” as the sensual passion of love to which it is linked, is more than a mere material ministrant to the philosophical endeavor. It is its underlying instigator, the wonderworking dynamic of which is wishfully but mistakenly referred by the Platonists to a divine origin.

Dionysius the Areopagite, Marzio reminded his readers, many centuries earlier had proclaimed that divine love causes ecstasy, that is, “it places men beyond themselves” (*extra seipsum homines ponens*). But this concept of ecstatic alienation, Marzio cautioned, was all too often misunderstood by the very mystics who experienced it, delud-

³⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 20, pp. 176–77.

³⁸ On the difficulty of ascertaining the origin of this “Aristotelian” empiricist maxim, which apparently owes, not to Aristotle himself, but to later Peripatetic theorists, see Paul F. Craneheld, “On the Origin of the Phrase *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 25 (1970), 77–80.

ing them into believing that they could take leave of their bodies in this life. Living (*vivere*), proclaimed Marzio, must always precede knowledge (*cognitio*). And living, he further insisted, “consists of the binding of soul and body;” when the body dies, so does the “binding” constituting human life. The same delusion applying to mystics, Marzio surmised, also applied to philosophers, whom he, like his contemporary Ficino, linked through the principle of ecstasy. For Marzio those philosophers deceived into believing that, with a leap of their minds, they could surpass the limits imposed on them by their corporeal bodies were in effect “dead philosophers” (*philosophi mortui*), the result of dissolving that very “binding of soul and body” essential to life. As Marzio put this point in compendious form: “For the absence of either body or soul always results in death.”³⁹

A salutary ramification of Marzio’s brand of sense-based naturalism, the advantage of historical hindsight informs us, was one of discouraging a zeal for the persecution of witches, lending philosophical buttressing to a physiological diagnosis of those claimed to be demoniacs. The attitude fostered by this more down-to-earth approach to those accused of being demonically inspired sorcerers was to counsel, not their execution, but their cure. This way of thinking was especially more likely when a given Aristotelian combined his philosophical speculations with medical training, as in the case of Andrea Cattaneo (fl. 1500–1526). Invoking the authority of Avicenna to lend support to that of Aristotle, Cattaneo attributed to natural melancholy, independently of supernatural spirits, the impetus behind those “who are vulgarly called demoniacs.” Far from needing to assume the role of detached spiritual substances in the provocation of mysterious behavior, according to Cattaneo, we can adequately explain such behavior in terms of the mental act alone, an interaction between the active intellect and a manifold of sensible forms “mediated by the phantasm.” And what, he exhorted, can more effectively spur such phantasms into action than the melancholy humor when it has become heated to the right temperature?⁴⁰ It was with the same thought in mind that Cattaneo’s contemporary Alessandro Benedetti, earlier cited in a related matter, wrote of those subject to “melancholy

³⁹ *De doctrina promiscua*. . . , cap. 20, p. 180.

⁴⁰ Andrea Cattaneo, *De intellectu et de causis mirabilium effectuum* (Florence: Philippi Giuntae, 1507), n.p. sigs. f vi^r-v. Originally from Imola, Cattaneo carried out his medical career chiefly in Pisa and Bologna. On Cattaneo’s role as a forerunner of Pomponazzi see Thorndike, *Magic*, V, 90–92.

visions" that, in addition to revealing such symptoms as timidity, sorrow, and a love of solitude, "they imagine themselves to be vexed by demons."⁴¹

The joint impact of thinking like that of Marzio, Cattaneo, and Benedetti, then, was to put on the defensive a presumption of demonic and divine provocation of human genius alike. For some tending to this extreme naturalist position on the genius question, among whom, paradoxically, we can find a Venetian cleric, Cristoforo Marcello (fl. 1527), even an ability of exceptional divinatory prognostication is explainable independently of divine intervention. While concurring with those, like Nifo, in perceiving the existence of an inner bond between ecstasy, prophecy, and melancholy, noting in this regard that "ecstatics, who are also generally wont to be melancholics, foresee future events," Marcello placed a radically naturalist reading on that observation. Thus, in the course of expounding Aristotle's own opinion on the matter, as distinct from that of his commentator Averroës, Marcello sharpened an underlying disparity he perceived between the Platonic and Aristotelian views of prophecy.

"The philosopher," Marcello observed, "ridicules the proposition, maintained by the Platonists, that true dreams come from God," his reasoning being that God in his sublimity and highest wisdom is not likely to impart His secret knowledge to "depraved and foolish men."⁴² So far as melancholics accurately predict the future, following Marcello's interpretation of Aristotle's own writings on the subject, they accomplish this *per accidens*, the result, not of supernatural clairvoyance as Plato maintained, but of extraordinary natural ability as Aristotle maintained. This did not mean, of course, that Marcello thereby rejected a basic tenet of his Catholic faith upholding the possibility of illuminated, melancholy-free prophecy. Being consigned to a rare few by divine fiat, Marcello determined that the answer to the mystery of such prophecy lay, not in the discursive speculations of the philosophers, but in the ineffable intuitions of the prophets themselves.

⁴¹ See above, p. 18.

⁴² Cristoforo Marcello, *Universalis de anima traditionis opus* (Venice: Apud Gregorium de Gregoriis, 1508; reprint, Westmead, Farnborough, Hants, England: Gregg International Publishers Ltd., 1969), lib. IV, cap. 12, fol. 193^r. Marcello, an apostolic pronotary and vehement anti-Lutheran who eventually assumed the archbishopric of Corfu, was captured and tortured in the sack of Rome of 1527.

The foregoing examples furnish evidence that Pomponazzi's radically naturalist version of human genius taken to task by Nifo did not arise *in vacuo*. Rather, they illustrate that the Renaissance Aristotelian revival, especially as it became increasingly informed by the nature-based commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, had succeeded in widening the conceptual breach separating the two leading theories of genius, Platonic and Aristotelian, before Pomponazzi entered on the scene. A secondary effect of this philosophically divisive process was to widen the gulf between philosophy and theology, or, put more trenchantly, between Aristotle and Christ.

The representatives of this naturalist trend in philosophy illustrate the temptation to which the Averroists were historically prone of falling back on the so-called double truth, one philosophical and the other theological. By this device they could theologially justify divine intervention in a given genial act while rejecting it philosophically. The overall effect of this reluctant concession to the limitations of philosophy was to corrode and eventually dissolve altogether the longstanding scholastic accord between philosophy and theology. It would be Pomponazzi's task, we will now see, with the question of the origin of genius serving him as an incisive philosophical wedge, to complete a dissolutive process that Averroism had started. With the identical escape hatch of the double-truth at his disposal, as we will now see, Pomponazzi gave new meaning to the late medieval adage, with the subject of human genius a focal point, that "between finite and infinite things there is no proportion."

C. *The Naturalist Reaction: Pomponazzi*

The philosophical query into the nature and origin of human genius, Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) agreed with Ficino and Nifo, is integrally bound up with two additional queries touching on the divide between natural and supernatural causation. The first query, the subject of his *De immortalitate*, pertains to the question of the soul's indestructibility, and the second query, the subject of his *De incantationibus*, to the question of the existence and efficacy of demons. As Pomponazzi understood as fully as those whom he took to task in these treatises, Nifo being his ostensible target but Ficino also influencing the discussion behind the scenes, whatever resolutions that might arise out

of the philosophical treatments of the immortality and demon questions also correlatively apply to the question of human genius.

What sharply distinguishes Pomponazzi's position on these related questions from that of his Platonically conditioned adversaries is that he philosophically turned their subordination of natural to supernatural principles on its head, subjecting supernatural to natural principles. More specifically, he reversed the subordination of melancholy to demonic and divine inspiration assigned to it by Ficino and Nifo, with melancholy now viewed, not as a material agent of supernatural powers, but as an independently efficacious instigator of genius capable of deceiving the mind into believing that it is being impelled by supernatural powers. While undoubtedly led to this position by the more rigorously naturalist version of Aristotelianism presented by the Alexandrists, Pomponazzi claimed Aristotle himself to be his philosophical authority.

Summarizing Pomponazzi's reversal of priorities in this matter is a syllogism he applied to the question of immortality in a polemic addressed to Nifo. The first premise of this syllogism, as presented by Pomponazzi, declares that "the soul, by definition according to universal opinion, is the act (*actus*) of the organic physical body;" the second premise, that "this definition, as Aristotle testifies, corresponds to the intellective soul;" and the conclusion, accordingly, that, inasmuch as "the intellective soul is, as it were, the act of the organic physical body, it has no independent operation."⁴³ Following the same reasoning Pomponazzi concluded that melancholy, deemed by the physicians to be a characteristic humoral agent of "the organic physical body," better explains the powers of human genius than the

⁴³ Pietro Pomponazzi, *Defensorium sive responsiones ad ea quae Augustinus Niphus Suessanus adversus ipsum scripsit: De immortalitate animae* (Bologna: Impressum per Magistrum Justinum de Ruberia, 1519), cap. 5, sig. AA iv^r. For an early cinquecento summary of the debate between Pomponazzi and Nifo over the nature of the human mind, explicitly referring their differences to the opposing Peripatetic strains of Averroism and Alexandrism, see Giulio Castellani, *De humano intellectu libri tres* (Bologna: Apud Alexandrum, 1561), pref., fols. 1^r v. On Pomponazzi's rejection of the conventional philosophical proofs for immortality see Kristeller, *Sources*, pp. 192–96; Di Napoli, *L'Immortalità*, pp. 179 ff.; and Trinkaus, *In our Image*, II, pp. 530 ff. On the controversy over the immortality of the soul triggering these tracts see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 142 ff.; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 73 ff.; Randall's intro. to the trans. of Pomponazzi's *De immortalitate*, in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 257 ff.; Luigi Olivieri, "La Scientificità della Teoria dell'Anima nell'Insegnamento Padovano di Pietro Pomponazzi," in Poppi, ed. *Scienza e Filosofia*, pp. 203 ff.; and, most recently, Martin L. Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1986), pp. 55 ff.

Platonic frenzies, which, when more stringently assessed under the guidelines of Aristotle's deductive logic, are no freer of the body's nature-based operations than the intellectual soul to which they philosophically correspond.

Differentiating Pomponazzi's genial outlook from that of Ficino and Nifo, then, was its presentation of natural melancholy as an alternative to, rather than complement of, supernatural inspiration. To lend support to his naturalist reformulation of the genius question Pomponazzi invoked an anecdote in his *De immortalitate*, furnished by his Paduan predecessor Pietro d'Abano, relating the story of an ignorant melancholy woman who could speak Latin but lost the ability when she was cured of her melancholy. And what, Pomponazzi inquired, was D'Abano's purpose in reporting this anecdote? To point out, he replied, that the ignorant woman's disordered melancholy imagination, together with the saturnine planet to which it is astrologically subject, better than the claim of divine intervention explains her extraordinary linguistic abilities.⁴⁴ Pomponazzi's utilization of D'Abano to undergird his nature-based critique of the Platonic genial theory, moreover, did not stop with the Conciliator's doubts about what made possible extraordinary linguistic powers. It extended to the question of what made possible extraordinary genial powers in all of their possible modes, the evil kind referred to demons as well as the good kind referred to God.

Concerning the prospect of demonically inspired genius that is the purported property of sorcerers, Pomponazzi, again with D'Abano's express assistance, noted in his *De incantationibus*, that "once those who are claimed to have a demon are purged of their melancholy, they no longer accomplish such marvelous things."⁴⁵ The marvels ascribed by vulgar opinion to sorcery, Pomponazzi surmised, can be viewed, when perceived from a higher philosophical plane, as proceeding from nothing more mysterious than a melancholy imagination. Whether expressed in this unfavorable "demonic" form or in

⁴⁴ Pomponazzi, *Tractatus de immortalitate animae*, ed. Gianfranco Morra (Bologna: Nanni & Fiammenghi, 1954), pp. 219–20. Cf. mod. trans. of William Henry Hay II in Cassirer et al., eds. *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 371. On D'Abano's prior use of this anecdote see above, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Pomponazzi, *De naturalium effectuum admirandorum causis seu de incantationibus liber*, cap. 10, in *Opera* (Basel: Ex officina Henricpetrina, 1567; repr., Hildesheim: George Olms, 1970), p. 141. On Pomponazzi's anti-demonic protestations see Thorndike, *Magic*, V, 94 ff.; Walker, *Magic*, pp. 107 ff.; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 82 ff.; Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 148 ff.; and Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers*, pp. 77 ff.

the favorable form termed the *furor divinus* by Plato, Pomponazzi proffered, “magic can be completely reduced to natural causes” (*quare tota magica poterit reduci in causas naturales*).⁴⁶

Granting that it greatly taxes our minds to grasp how some men perform great feats of the mind with seemingly little effort, Pomponazzi denied that this philosophical puzzlement was to be solved by resort to a reputed cause exceeding the legitimate bounds of philosophy. “Just as some are found who, from their knowledge of books, experience, instruction, or other such means, possess skill in reading the stars, of interpreting omens or dreams, or engaging in similar activities,” Pomponazzi freely conceded, “likewise occasionally appear those who, without the application of exertion or labor, possess such knowledge and perform such marvels as if they were endowed by a gift of the gods and of the celestial bodies.” Or putting the same enigma another way, he allowed that “just as men are observed who possess skill (*peritia*) in the reading of the stars and knowledge of auguries, dreams, and other such things from the knowledge of books, from experience, from teaching and the like, likewise men are sometimes construed as possessing such powers of cognition and of effecting ‘miracles’ by a gift of the gods and of celestial bodies without exercise and labor.” Some desirous of bypassing this intellectual conundrum, however, he charged, being intellectually incapable of philosophically ascertaining the true reasons for extraordinary genial accomplishments, fallaciously conclude “that such men possess this power, with the celestial bodies mediating, as a gift of the gods.”⁴⁷

Enlarging on his view of those who, with Plato their authority, presumed to posit a shortcut to the cause of genius, Pomponazzi replied that “the vulgar, who do not comprehend the causes of things, believe that such men are demoniacs or saints, born with this gift from the maternal womb or outside the maternal womb, so that these indeed declare that such men have this ability by a gift of the gods, mediating, as they are presumed to do, with celestial bodies.” Such a supposition, Pomponazzi averred, “although it appears as the truth to the incredulous vulgar,” is nevertheless recognized to be patently false by true philosophers.⁴⁸ In sum, he charged, “it is a custom of the vulgar to assign to demons or angels that of which

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 7, p. 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 10, p. 124.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the causes are unknown.”⁴⁹ Against the temptation of the vulgar to read supernatural causation into strange and unexpected occurrences effected by human genius, Pomponazzi counseled the sobering restraints of natural philosophy.

Ironically, included by Pomponazzi among the ancient philosophers curbing themselves by such sobering restraints was not only Aristotle, but also Plato. For it was Pomponazzi’s belief that his Platonic opponents had misunderstood the true intent of their master’s teaching. “Plato did not introduce angels and demons as factual because he believed in them,” Pomponazzi claimed in this regard, “but because his aim was to instruct rude men.”⁵⁰ Thus, he charged, to take such a fiction for the literal truth was to acknowledge membership among the ignorant *vulgares* to whom Plato directed his imaginary conceits.

To say that Pomponazzi rejected a supernatural ingress into the genial function is not the same as saying, however, that he rejected occult influences from above. Like Ficino and Nifo, Pomponazzi was a firm believer in astrological impressionability; unlike Ficino and Nifo, however, who had viewed the stars as celestial mediators of the divine frenzies, he declared celestial suggestibility to be a wholly natural function. As he put this opinion in the *De immortalitate*, genial powers are effected, not by a divine inspiration as the Platonists errantly believed, but “from a disposition of the body in unison with the motion of the stars.”⁵¹ Or as he alternatively expressed this credo in his *De incantationibus*, genius “is nothing else but the product of the birth of a man, so that those who have good birth have good genius, and those who have bad birth have bad genius.”⁵²

Of the kinds of genial functions cited by the Platonists as highlighting the need for supernatural assistance, two in particular called for extensive treatment by Pomponazzi. The first is the ability to prophesy with such uncanny accuracy that the mind of the prophet appears to be divinely illuminated, and the second, the ability to poetize with such eloquent facility that the mind of the poet appears to be divinely moved. On both counts Pomponazzi undermined the Platonic inspiration theory by determining that natural melancholy

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, cap. 12, p. 230.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, cap. 10, p. 202.

⁵¹ *De immortalitate*, p. 219 (*Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 371).

⁵² *De incantationibus*, cap. 10, in *Opera*, p. 198.

alone, under the astrological rule of Saturn, is adequate to the explanation of human genius without a further reference to higher supernatural influences.

The revelatory powers of prophets, Pomponazzi agreed with the Platonists, are essentially interlocked with the ecstatic powers of mystics; hence, corresponding to his position on demonically incited alienation, a reduction of mystical ecstasy to its natural ingredients also necessarily carries over to its prophetic affiliate. Concerning those appearing to be caught up in a state of mystical rapture, Pomponazzi declared in his *De immortalitate* that “all such men are suffering either from black bile or insanity, or from a trance, or are near death and far from human thoughts; hence they become almost lifeless and irrational.”⁵³ In like fashion Pomponazzi declared melancholy in his *De incantationibus* to be a prime instigator, independently of divine causes, of those who, “while they prophesy, as Virgil declares in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* concerning the Cumaean Sibyl, rave and grow frenzied.”⁵⁴

From his Aristotelian vantage point Pomponazzi cast a skeptical eye on those who presume, by virtue of a secret access to divine knowledge, to predict the future with perfect clarity and certainty. Pomponazzi rather maintained that vaticinal abilities owe to nothing more exalted than natural melancholy, and further that the uncanny predictions of melancholics are based on laws, not of certainty, but only of high probability. The natural basis of such precognitive powers, Pomponazzi noted, is underscored by the fact that human beings share them with the animal and mineral kingdoms. Among earlier authorities called upon by Pomponazzi for substantiation of the natural basis of prophecy, Plutarch (ca. 50–120), for one, reflected that “even cows and other animals have prophesied,” and Albertus Magnus, for another, “declares in his treatise on minerals that stones are frequently impressed with the figures of various animals, some of which possess the virtue of divination, others the revelations of secrets, and still others countless comparable marvels.” It should not surprise us, therefore, Pomponazzi pointed out, to discover a comparable prophetic capability residing in man, “who is the intermediary between the eternal and corruptible spheres, and

⁵³ *De immortalitate*, cap. 14, p. 220 (*Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 372).

⁵⁴ *De incantationibus*, cap. 10, in *Opera*, p. 140. Cf. *De immortalitate*, cap. 14, trans. Hay, in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 372.

thereby all the more susceptible to such [natural] impressions?"⁵⁵

Nevertheless, while rejecting a supernatural instigation of prophetic power, Pomponazzi by no means felt called upon thereby to dispense with all divinatory influence from above the earth's surface. For, pertaining to prophetic as to related forms of genius, it was his belief that the planetary spheres, the subject of astrology, represents an extension of the natural realm. Thus, reiterating Aristotle's observation that one is especially receptive to the prophetic gift "in a state of quietness or in sleep," when the melancholy humor is also likely to be most active, Pomponazzi added that prescient knowledge "is mediated by celestial bodies."⁵⁶ The subject of prophetic prediction underscored a principle for Pomponazzi that applied to the subject of human genius in general, to wit, that the planets are not, as the Platonists believed, intermediaries of supernatural virtues, but generators of wholly natural virtues.

Pomponazzi's treatment of the prophecy question throws into sharp relief his differences not only with the Florentine Platonists, but also with his fellow Aristotelians of the Averroist persuasion. For by conceiving of a world-soul existing independently of matter, the Averroists could, by extension, conceive of prophetic insight as an essentially supernatural act by which knowledge of the future, latently contained within the world-soul, is able to be occultly tapped by one divinely equipped to receive it. Pomponazzi, on the other hand, by rejecting a belief in both collective immortality implicit in the Averroist concept of the world-soul and individual immortality as it was reaffirmed by the Florentine Platonists, was left with nature itself as the only possible repository of prophetic intuition. Thus, against his Platonized Averroist colleagues, Pomponazzi complained: "Those who assign to the mind of Aristotle some immaterial substances which exist beyond the intelligences moving the orbs do not at all speak the opinion of Aristotle, but on the contrary are to be held as utterly in contradiction to his teaching."⁵⁷ Of the "Aristotelian" writings he had in mind when making this anti-Averroist pronouncement, Pomponazzi counted the *Problemata*, interpreting it to say that natural

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128. On the credulity of Plutarch and Albertus Magnus in matters of the arcana see Thorndike, *Magic*, I, ch. 6, pp. 200 ff., and II, ch. 59, pp. 517 ff., with Albertus' treatise on minerals treated at p. 566.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 12, p. 227.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 13, p. 298.

melancholy alone can account for what the Platonists claimed to be divinely instilled revelations.

Just as Pomponazzi furnished a natural explanation for mystical and prophetic genius, so did he do the same for poetic genius. Having undercut the claim of the Platonists that mystical and prophetic alienation is divinely caused, Pomponazzi also, by extension, undercut the comparable claim pertaining to poetic alienation modeled on that of the mystics and prophets. Extensively quoting from writings of Plato that had expressly espoused the theory of poetic frenzy, most notably the *Meno*, *Phaedrus*, and *Ion*, Pomponazzi reiterated his opinion that the inspiration doctrine articulated in those texts was intended by their author to be taken figuratively rather than literally.

Examples of Plato's metaphorical method, Pomponazzi contended, are found in the asseveration in the *Meno* that poets, inasmuch as "they are, for the most part, ignorant of that which they declare," are born rather than made; in the comparison of poets to prophets, sibyls, and augurs in the *Phaedrus*, all of whom "are ecstasies, and led by frenzy;" and in the attribution to the poet in the *Ion* of an invisible divine power (*vis divina*) that moves his listeners with the passions provoked by his words much as a magnet invisibly attracts and moves metals upon which it comes into contact. Concerning the last-named analogy Pomponazzi declared that the *vis poetica* no more needs to be referred to a supernatural cause than does the *vis magnetica* residing within nature. If what Plato presented in these writings is to be taken as literally true, "poets are to be viewed as nothing else but interpreters of the gods."⁵⁸ Pomponazzi, on the other hand, viewed poetic genius as owing no more to a supernatural source than mystical or prophetic genius to which it was popularly compared.

A far better candidate for excitation of the poetic genial function than a supernatural frenzy, Pomponazzi contended, is naturally enkindled melancholy. It is in this light that Pomponazzi interpreted the sole case of poetic melancholy indicated by the author of the *Problemata*, that of the obscure Maracus the Syracusan. For, chided Pomponazzi, far from being "instigated by a divine breath" as the Platonists would have us believe, Maracus in truth was incited by nothing more sublime than his own natural melancholy.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 10, p. 127. On Pomponazzi's "restricted view of the whole problem of poetics," see Weinberg, *History of Literary Criticism*, I, 260.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

On the subject of genius in its multifarious forms, it is true, Pomponazzi did not reject out-of-hand the possibility of direct supernatural influence, whether demonic and divine, on the human mind. What he vigorously rejected, in implicit agreement with his contemporary Marcello, was the proposition that philosophy is able to reason out such influence, the subject of which exceeds its legitimate boundaries. That did not mean, however, that faith for Pomponazzi could not impart knowledge about this question which is closed off to discursive reason. Even as he carried the Aristotelian naturalist principles to their rigorous conclusion, Pomponazzi openly acknowledged their contradiction of the articles of Christian faith, with his proposed resolution to the logical impasses thrown into relief by his philosophical speculations resembling that commonly associated with his Averroist opponents, the “double truth,” whereby what is disallowed by reason can nevertheless be reasserted fideistically. Testimony to this way out of his logical conundrum is indicated by a skeptical disclaimer presenting itself in the last chapter of his *De immortalitate*—this following a succession of earlier chapters proving philosophically that the soul is mortal and thus must die with the body. “Wherefore we shall say, as Plato said in the *Laws*,” Pomponazzi at last concluded his discussion of immortality, “that to be certain of anything, when many are in doubt, is for God alone.”⁶⁰ The irony here is that Pomponazzi had now turned Plato, the principal butt of his entire corpus of philosophical writings, into a fideist-skeptical ally helping to lead him out of the philosophical labyrinth in which he had entrapped himself.

What remains with Pomponazzi’s posthumous readers, nevertheless, is not his last-ditch effort to reaffirm his orthodoxy by a fideist appeal to the double-truth. It is rather his stringent use of a radical brand of Aristotelian naturalism to counter the supernaturalist doctrines of Plato. On the question of human genius as on the affiliated questions of alienation popularly attributed to supernatural instigation, it was Pomponazzi’s radical philosophical naturalism rather than his fideism that was to define his place in intellectual history for future generations. In this regard Pomponazzi’s approach to the question of genius appears to convey much the same sense of cynical irony as Machiavelli contemporaneously applied to the legitimacy

⁶⁰ Pomponazzi, *De immortalitate*, cap. 15, trans. Hay, in Cassirer et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 377. Reference is to Plato’s *Laws*, i, 641d.

of ecclesiastical principalities when he cynically conceded: "But as they are upheld by higher causes, which the human mind cannot attain to, I will abstain from speaking of them; for being exalted and maintained by God, it would be the work of a presumptuous and foolish man to discuss them."⁶¹ Nevertheless, as will now be our task to demonstrate, the unbridgeable chasm that Pomponazzi and Machiavelli jointly perceived to exist between things of reason and things of faith could just as readily serve the cause of religious faith as of secularly applied reason in the Machiavellian manner.

By opting for a fideist way out of the quandary presented by his philosophical speculations Pomponazzi fell into common cause not only with the Averroist doctrine of the double-truth, but also with a conscious revival of ancient skeptical Pyrrhonism concurrently taking place at the behest of Giovanni Pico's nephew Gianfrancesco Pico (1470–1533), a philosophically disillusioned disciple of the charismatic Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498).⁶² If one significant literary issue of the Savonarolan influence on Gianfrancesco was his *Examen vanitatis*, another is his companion piece, the *De rerum praenotione*, purporting to offer, with illuminated prophecy its guiding theme, a transrational way out of the philosophical morass imposed on the mind by the rational categories of dogmatic philosophy. To be sure, Pomponazzi's skepticism toward the powers of philosophy to solve a mysterious enigma like human genius came from a quite different place from that motivating the academic skepticism of

⁶¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 11, trans. Luigi Ricci and E.R.P. Vincent, in *The Prince and The Discourses* (New York: Modern Library, 1940, 1950), p. 42. On the philosophical kinship between Pomponazzi and Machiavelli see Randall, *School of Padua*, p. 89, reiterated in *Career of Philosophy*, I, p. 74: "Within his [viz., Pomponazzi's] close-knit argument there burns a vision of man more akin to the insight of that other Florentine, Machiavelli, than to the rather sentimental piety of the [Platonic] Academy. . . ." Cf. Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 148: "In many senses, Pomponazzi's mind was akin to that of Machiavelli. Both directed their gaze entirely upon the earth." Further reinforcing this "Machiavellian" reading of Pomponazzi's philosophical outlook is Pine, *Pomponazzi*, who maintains, p. 74, that for Pomponazzi "men are far more bestial than rational." Cf. Pine, p. 123, underscoring the hollowness of Pomponazzi's fideist escape from his philosophical propositions: "The fideistic superiority of faith proclaimed by Pomponazzi is a device used to hide the destructive conclusions of reason under conventionally acceptable usages of the day." Identifying Pompanazzi's nature-based skepticism with atheism is Don Cameron Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), pp. 28 ff.

⁶² In subsequent references the appellation Gianfrancesco is employed to distinguish its bearer from his uncle Giovanni, heretofore referred to, for the sake of brevity, as Pico.

Gianfrancesco Pico. It arose, not from an intent to revive the ancient skeptical doctrines of Pyrrho of Elis (ca. 365–275 B.C.) and Sextus Empiricus (ca. 200 A.D.), but from a determination to carry the principles of natural philosophy to their rigorous conclusion. The end result, nevertheless, was the same, undercutting the pretensions of philosophical reason to comprehend the ineffable mysteries of Christian faith, including among them the mystery of human genius.

Underlying and conditioning this fideist-skeptical shift in early modern philosophical thought, historical hindsight reveals, was a concurrent theological shift by the religious reformers increasingly opposing faith to reason. As illustrated by Gianfrancesco Pico, however, this disjunctive trend did not need to await Luther. Its basic features were in place in pre-Lutheran Italy, where the apocalyptically driven Savonarola, with Florence providing him with a prominent bully pulpit after he emigrated there from his native Ferrara, assembled an army of piously motivated allies, Gianfrancesco among them, to force philosophy into retreat. Corresponding to the retreat of philosophy in the movement led by Savonarola was a retreat of the theory of melancholy genius popularized by the Florentine Platonists. Before we can fully appreciate what Gianfrancesco was about in his skeptical rejection of Ficino's synthesized theory of human genius, accordingly, we first need to come to terms with what Savonarola was about as he came, if in less systematic fashion, to a comparable position.

D. *The Skeptical Reaction: Savonarola and Gianfrancesco Pico*

Should we seek out a precedent for the thesis set forth by Gianfrancesco Pico in his *De rerum praenotione*, none more directly speaks to the point than Savonarola's pronouncement from his Florentine pulpit: "Divination of future occurrences, if it be from the Holy Spirit, is good, but if it is accomplished by other means, it is reprobate and not to be permitted. For to predict the future is the sole property of God."⁶³ The Ferraran native, moreover, did not stop with generalities, declaring himself to be a specially chosen mediating instrument of God's

⁶³ Girolamo Savonarola, *In Nativitate Domini*, in *Il Primo Savonarola: Poesie e Prediche Autografe dal Codice Borromeo*, ed. Giulio Cattin (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1973), p. 274. For the formative influence of Savonarola on Gianfrancesco see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 220 ff.

prophecy-giving illuminations with the pronouncement to his audience that “this light has been given me, not for myself, but for you.”⁶⁴ Significantly, Savonarola did not, as did Ficino in relation to what he considered to be his comparably inspired philosophical endeavors, announce himself to be a melancholic. For to do so, from Savonarola’s point of view, would have been the same as admitting vulnerability to diabolical interference in his reception of God’s illuminating rays. Having liberated prophecy from all natural dependency, Savonarola had no recourse but to liberate it as well, by implication if not by explication, from dependency on the melancholy humor commonly believed to serve as a foremost demonic inroad into the soul.

If the liberation of prophetic insight from the rational categories of the philosophers was one decisive consequence of Savonarola’s religious program, another was its liberation from the imaginative fancies of the poets. Instead of being enrolled, as for Ficino and Giovanni Pico, in the service of inspired prophecy, poetry was construed by Savonarola to be a sense-based obstacle to the reception of lucid prophetic revelations, placing both the poet and the art over which he exercised proficiency in a state of abject inferiority in relation to the supersensual powers of genuine prophecy.⁶⁵

Poets claiming the powers of prophecy, Savonarola charged, in truth rationalize their wicked ways by dressing their vain poetic fictions in the garb of sanctity. “Propped up by very inept and puerile arguments,” he charged, poets erroneously claim to range with considerable adroitness “in divine, natural, and moral matters,” asserting in support that “the divine prophets sang in verses, and again, that Holy Scripture, just as poetry, employs the similitudes of metaphor, and that poetry is nothing other than theology.” In reply Savonarola countered that “there is a great difference between the verses of the gentile poets and those of the prophets,” the chief one being that, whereas God is immediately present in the utterances of the prophets, there is hidden in the utterances of the poets “a great snare of the

⁶⁴ Savonarola, *Dello rinnovazione della Chiesa*, excerpted from *Prediche ai Fiorentini*, in *Prosatori Volgari del Quattrocento*, ed. Claudio Varese, La Letteratura Italiana: Storia e Testi, Vol. 14 (Milan/Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955), p. 90.

⁶⁵ Savonarola, *Universae philosophiae epitome*, ed. Johan. Jessenii à Jessen (Wittenberg: Excusa typis Simonis Gronenbergii, 1596), opusc. IV, lib. IV: “De poeticae ratione,” p. 810. According to Greenfield, *Poetics*, p. 248, Savonarola held poetics to be “part of rational philosophy,” his reasoning being that “the syllogism, which Aristotle called *exemplum*, is the content of the poetic art.”

Devil." Over and against the diabolically inspired songs of the poets Savonarola posed the divinely incited "songs of the prophets which, inasmuch as they have been acquired from the Holy Spirit, are redolent with wisdom, with divine love, and with humility." In antithesis to the poets, he averred, "the Christian doctors and students of the Scriptures, because they are inwardly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, do not attempt to investigate the composition of words, but the eternal hidden truth and marvelous mysteries."⁶⁶ It followed for Savonarola that a prophetic insight "inwardly illuminated by the Holy Spirit," being referable to a realm transcending the sense-based one in which the diabolically manipulatable imaginations of the poets are immersed, is also referable to a realm transcending natural melancholy in service to the senses.

In this way Savonarola, in one fell swoop, undercut both the Platonic concept of the divinely inspired poet, depending for its credibility on a presumed kinship between the poetic and prophetic functions, and the Aristotelian concept of the melancholy poet, whose bilious complexion would be appropriate for attracting diabolical influences but wholly inappropriate for attracting divine ones. While allowing that prophets sometimes employed verse to convey to others their illuminated visions, he insisted that this was only "by accident" (*per accidens*), a strategy adopted "for the purpose of enticing the sick minds of men (*ad alliciendum animos hominum infirmos*)."⁶⁷ Savonarola did not view this reluctant concession to the poets, however, as in any way compromising his vision of the supersensual origin of prophecy, since it applied, as he saw it, not to prophecy's substance, but to the method a sense-free prophet might choose to communicate his divinely inspired revelations to the sense-dependent minds of others. While not expressly saying so, Savonarola could consistently have made the same concession to the melancholy humor, thereby leaving the way open to viewing it, if not as an active material cause in the sense upheld by the Ficinians, as a passive, "accidental" consequence of the prophet's interaction with the sensual world. What is more noteworthy for our purposes than this possible implication of Savonarola's qualification of his stridently anti-poetic vociferations, however, is his radical extrication of the prophetic impulse from what he believed to be a philosophical stranglehold grounded in the senses and in the corporeal humors tied to the senses.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 813.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 814–15.

Among those heartily concurring with Savonarola's lofty self-image as a specially chosen refractor of the divine light was a former member of Ficino's Florentine circle, Giovanni Nesi (1456–1520), who declared the Dominican preacher to be "divine in prophesying" (*in vaticinando divinus*).⁶⁸ No more for Nesi than for Savonarola, however, did such an attribution entail, as a physiological correlative, fits of melancholy. Nesi's further characterization of Savonarola as "the Socrates of Ferrara" (*Ferrariensis Socrates*),⁶⁹ inviting comparison with a man depicted by Ficino in his *De amore* as a melancholy lover of the truth, did not negate this assumption. For, unlike the melancholy Socrates of Athens celebrated by Ficino as caught up in the thralls of divine frenzy, the man celebrated by Nesi as the Ferraran Socrates assumed to himself the task, not of wedding philosophy to theology, but of liberating theology from the natural restraints—including, we are to assume, the restraint of melancholy—imposed on it by philosophy.

Adopting a like way of thinking was Savonarola's disciple and biographer Gianfrancesco Pico, who, despite earlier personal ties to his speculative uncle Giovanni, placed himself in tutelage, not to the rationalized fideism of Ficino and Giovanni Pico, but to the anti-rational fideism of "the Socrates of Ferrara." In the furtherance of this objective Gianfrancesco initiated a philosophical revival comparable to those of the concurrent Platonic and Aristotelian revivals, though, in his case, intended to undercut rather than coalesce the union of their principles—the revival, that is, of the ancient school of philosophical skepticism fathered by Pyrrho of Elis and conveyed to posterity through the writings of Sextus Empiricus. If Savonarola's anti-philosophical sentiments can be said to have already made some inroad into the thinking of Giovanni Pico shortly his premature death in 1494, prompting, among other modifications of his previously optimistic view of philosophical reason, his attack on astrology, all the more forcefully can they be said to have impacted on his young nephew Gianfrancesco, who, by this time having become thoroughly disenchanted with the Florentine Platonic program, found in ancient Pyrrhonism a useful tool for severing the rational vinculum that

⁶⁸ Giovanni Nesi, *Oraculum de novo saeculo* (Florence: Ex archetypo Ser Laurentius de Morganus, 1497), sig. b v^r.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Ficino and his disciples had forged between naturally and supernaturally derived knowledge.

By a combination of anti-scholastic fideism and formal academic skepticism consciously derived from the ancient Greeks and Romans, Gianfrancesco set out, most pointedly in his *Examen vanitatis*, to dismantle the systematic synthesis of philosophy and theology attempted by his uncle and others belonging to Ficino's Florentine circle. In the process, he also dismantled the synthesis Ficino had offered between an Aristotelian-based theory of melancholy genius and a Platonic-based theory of genius instilled through divine frenzy. Of the kinds of human genius bearing on this dissolutive program of Gianfrancesco in Savonarola's footsteps, as cogently set forth in his *De rerum praenotione*, central to his thinking was that allowing for accurate prophetic prediction.

* * *

Of the ancient philosophical positions taken to task by Gianfrancesco in his campaign to demonstrate the incompatibility of faith and reason, Aristotle's better than Plato's pointed up for him philosophy's deficiencies. "Aristotle's art of demonstration is uncertain," Gianfrancesco proclaimed, "because it is founded on the evidence and judgment of the senses."⁷⁰ On this point Gianfrancesco had much in common with Ficino, whose writings are replete with similarly uncomplimentary references to Aristotle's over-reliance on the

⁷⁰ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Examen vanitati Christianae disciplinae*, lib. V, cap. 2, in *Opera omnia*, II, 1071. Also cited in Garin, *Storia*, II, 593. On the *Examen vanitatis* see esp. Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533) and his Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), pp. 49-54, and *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the 'Academia' in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), pp. 12, 73-77, et passim. For the formative influence of Savonarola on Gianfrancesco see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 220 ff. For the background of Renaissance skepticism see Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, pp. 19-22; Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 133-35; and Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, pp. 6 ff. Nevertheless, according to Popkin, pp. 19-22, Gianfrancesco's tract had little impact on his age, serving more as an isolated precursor of the later "renaissance of skepticism" famously represented by the Frenchman Michele de Montaigne (1533-1592) than as itself a major vehicle for skeptical principles. Cf. Schmitt, p. 160, and, concerning a comparably skeptical attack on Aristotle in the north by Agrippa of Nettesheim in his *De vanitate* (1526), Charles G. Nauert, Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 295 and passim.

senses in contrast to the sense-free ideas of Plato. To the extent, however, that Ficino had allowed what Gianfrancesco had deemed to be the corrupting naturalist principles of Aristotle to intrude into his philosophical speculations, his Platonically conditioned philosophical speculations were just as subject to Gianfrancesco's skeptical critique as its Peripatetic counterpart. At the same time, underscored by his corresponding treatment of the genius question, Gianfrancesco's methodological departure from the Florentine Platonists did not necessarily entail departures in substance. Rather, though traveling along a different philosophical route, Gianfrancesco arrived at many of the positions staked out by the Ficinian Platonists, including the view that genius is supernaturally endowed—now divested, however, of what he believed to be an encumbering Aristotelian adjunct to the Platonic inspiration doctrine in the form of an inflamed melancholy humor. More particularly, in keeping with the late medieval maxim maintaining ontological disproportion between between the finite and infinite realms, Gianfrancesco could find no proportion between a finite material humor like melancholy, claimed by Aristotelians and Aristotelian-compromised Platonists alike as a mark of human genius, and the infinite demands imposed upon the human mind by God.

The dark underbelly of this question, as has been extensively demonstrated in the previous pages, lay in the claim of demonically instilled genius. Just as as the Platonic revival spearheaded by Ficino furnished a philosophical rationale for the witch persecutions, so did the skeptical revival spearheaded by Gianfrancesco. "In the same way that the Demon deceived the ancient philosophers under the mask of learning, that is, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Apollonius and other like-minded thinkers (using snares on those whom it thinks it might easily be able to entrap)," Gianfrancesco reverberated a prominent theme of the witch hunters, "so has it seduced weak and simple-minded women with its lewd ways and inebriations."⁷¹ A noteworthy consequence of Aristotle's immersion in the natural senses, according to Gianfrancesco, was his ignorance of the demonic realm. More specifically in relation to the basic issue lying behind the composition of his *De rerum praenotione*, Gianfrancesco determined that Aristotle

⁷¹ Gianfrancesco Pico, *La Strega ovvero degli Inganni de'Demonii*, trans. Turino Turini (Milan: G. Daelli, 1864, based on ed. of Pescia, 1555), lib. 1, p. 49. This Italian trans. has recently been edited, with an intro., by Ida Li Vigni (Genoa: Edizioni Culturali Internazionali, 1988). On the original Latin tract printed first in 1523, *Strix sive ludificatione daemonum*, and immediate Italian trans. in 1524 by Leandro Alberti, see Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, pp. 28–29.

and his followers had failed adequately to distinguish the kind of false prophetic ecstasies incited by demons from the authentic revelatory ecstasies epitomized in his hero Savonarola.

In His omniscience, proclaimed Gianfrancesco, God is not content to keep to Himself His perfect grasp of all things past, present, and future, but rather, for reasons known only to Himself, imparts bits and pieces of this knowledge to human beings through specially chosen mediating vessels. More particularly, God has determined "to reveal these things through prophets, through angels, and finally through His own Son and apostles."⁷² With Savonarola his prime role model, it was not enough for Gianfrancesco Pico to declare the essential independence of a genuine prophetic act from finite nature. It was also crucial to his purpose to establish criteria of distinction between true prophecy and its false look-alike ingendered, not by God, but by the Devil.

As Gianfrancesco admonished in the latter connection: "Many presume to the power of precognition, not with the help of divine or natural light, but by the work of a demon and dark superstition." In compliance with its wicked provocations, Gianfrancesco observed, "magicians go mad, necromancers become frenzied, astrologers pose and deceive as diviners, geomancers speak nonsense, and chiromancers grow delirious," all of whom, he declared, "are said to predict, but not properly or legitimately."⁷³ Significantly, although the melancholy humor fails to show up as a factor in Gianfrancesco's rendition of divinely inspired prophecy, the same cannot be said concerning its demonic caricature; indeed, in its renowned role as the Devil's bath, melancholy loomed for Gianfrancesco as one of the salient marks distinguishing false from true prophecy. A natural disturbance such as melancholy which should come into association with a prophetic experience, charged Gianfrancesco, constitutes at best a worldly impediment to the reception of the supernal illuminations making the certainty of prediction possible, and, at worst, a deceptive agent of the Devil in his endeavor to seduce human beings away from God.

⁷² Gianfrancesco Pico, *De rerum praenotione*, lib. I, cap. 4, in *Opera omnia*, II, 379. For Gianfrancesco's inclusion of Savonarola in the first-named group see his *Vita R.P. Fr. Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis Or. Praedicatorum*, 2 vols. (Paris: Sumptibus Ludovici Billaine, 1674), esp. cap. 5: "De divinis citra valamen revelationibus, quarum particeps factus Hieronymus futuras praedixit clades," I, 16 ff.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 5, p. 382. Also cited in Garin, *Storia*, II, 589.

At the forefront of Gianfrancesco's campaign to distinguish the two kinds of prophecy, divine and diabolical, was the same subject to which his uncle Giovanni had addressed himself to its detriment, astrology. Under Savonarola's influence Gianfrancesco vigorously seconded his uncle Giovanni's attack on judicial astrology, putting it down as "superstitious foreknowledge" (*praenotio superstitiosa*).⁷⁴ However, more rigorously consistent than his elder relative, Gianfrancesco coupled his opposition to astrology with a fundamental opposition to magic in general. The objection of Gianfrancesco to astrological prediction, that is to say, was conditioned by a concern of wider sweep than its implied refutation of free will. He held the entire field of magic with which astrology was commonly associated, including the natural magic apotheosized by Ficino and Giovanni Pico as occultly binding the earth to the heavens, to be a favored diabolical means for mimicking the miracles of God.⁷⁵

For Ficino, as we have seen, natural melancholy exhibited marvelous powers, including prophetic powers, representing a special case of the powers of natural magic. Both licit natural magic and natural melancholy in the employ of magic, Ficino believed, are inherently compatible with the needs of prophetic enlightenment. Conversely, having rejected the need of a natural medium for the transmission and reception of prophetic illumination, Gianfrancesco repudiated the thesis that natural magic and natural melancholy in its service are possible mediators of divinely emitted effusions, maintaining, on the contrary, that they are far more suitable mediators of diabolical delusions fabricating prophetic illumination. In fine, the use of melancholy by the Devil to feign prophetic insight represented for Gianfrancesco Pico a particular instance of the Devil's use of natural magic as a whole to feign divine miracles.

A time-tested technique of the solitary life serving to reinforce Gianfrancesco's hostility to melancholy, in his day consciously resurrected by the Catholic reformers as an answer to the Protestant attack on monasticism, was that of spiritual exercises. "From imagination more than properly intent, and from its too frequent functioning," wrote Gianfrancesco in his *De imaginatione*, "many have suffered fainting spells, and even been driven to insanity." And of

⁷⁴ See, e.g., *De rerum praenotione*, lib. V: "De superstitiosa praenotione contra astrologiam divinatricem," in *Opera omnia*, II, 504 ff.

⁷⁵ See Walker, *Magic*, pp. 146-51.

the kinds of "insanity" that Gianfrancesco had in mind when he recorded these words, none was more conspicuously evident than that diagnosed by the physicians as melancholy. Calling attention to the unwanted intrusion of melancholy into the retreat of a solitary contemplative, with the French mystic Gerson his express guide, Gianfrancesco warned that "this is very perilous to those devoted to the contemplative life, who give free reign to the imagination." In this way Gianfrancesco freed not only solitary contemplatives from the melancholy-inducing turbulences instigated by the demons, but also solitary prophets, the lucidity of whose revelations depends on the absolute severance of their minds from interference by the sense-based bodily humors. Relevant to both of these alienated states at once is Gianfrancesco Pico's counsel that "if the imagination is too mobile and loose, we must seek a single image or a few on which to dwell, in order to be at ease from that tumult and varying concourse of impressions." By the same token, "if any one is too sad, he should strive to turn to joy; if too joyful, to sadness. If he is too sluggish, he should try to grow excited, if more than properly excited, to become calm."⁷⁶ As not only Gerson helped Gianfrancesco to perceive in this regard, but also numerous medical theorists and natural philosophers on whom Gerson also drew to back up his appeal to strict solitary discipline, an "imagination . . . too mobile and loose" is both a cause and an effect of melancholy.

For Gianfrancesco, accordingly, the divinely preordained dictate of the mystic-prophet, far from being one of cultivating melancholy in solitary retreat from the crowd, was rather systematically to purge melancholy, the "bath of the Devil," from his solitary meditations. To uphold otherwise, as did Ficino or Giovanni Pico, is to stumble into the pitfall of a logical absurdity, namely, that melancholy, which has the inborn effect of weighing us down to the material realm, can concurrently lift us into the spiritual realm transcending matter. For it was Gianfrancesco Pico's belief, epitomized in his biographical apolegetic of Savonarola and elaborated in his *De rerum praenotione*, that all true prophecy is unmediated prophecy, a direct revelation from God.

⁷⁶ Gianfrancesco Pico, *On the Imagination [De imaginatione]*, ed., trans. Harry Caplan, Cornell Studies in English, Vol. XVI (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1930), pp. 61, 62 (*Opera omnia*, II, pp. 141-43). For Gerson's influence on earlier Italian mystics, most notably Pietro da Lucca, see above, p. 42.

* * *

Gianfrancesco's skeptical attack on dogmatic philosophy illustrates a principle that can also be illustrated within the bounds of the major dogmatic schools against which he directed his offensive. Under the pressure of a number of catastrophic events taking place in the later decades of the later Renaissance—theological and ecclesiastical schism, the Italian wars, and the witch persecutions among them—Renaissance philosophy was increasingly pushed into acknowledging, not the *conjunction* between the supernatural and natural spheres of existence, but their *disjunction*. Assisting a disjunctive philosophical trend in tandem with the skeptical revival pioneered by Gianfrancesco, we have pointed out, were Aristotelian radicals along the lines of Marzio and Pomponazzi. As we will subsequently observe, moreover, such disjunctive tendencies were not restricted to the Peripatetic and Pyrrhonist revivals. In a subsequent chapter we will also encounter a comparable tendency among certain of the Platonists in Ficino's own footsteps, who found that they could no longer accept the proposition put into vogue by Ficino that the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy and the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius are two ways of saying the same thing.

So far as the witch-craze helped to force the issue of the origin of genius, we have demonstrated that philosophical skepticism could as easily be employed on one side as of the other of the naturalist-supernaturalist cleavage. Entrenched on one side of this divide were skeptical fideists in the mode of Savonarola and his disciple Gianfrancesco Pico, who, while persuaded that the existence and efficacy of demons are rationally unprovable, were equally persuaded that they could be intuitively experienced. And entrenched on the other side of this divide were skeptical naturalists in the mode of Pomponazzi who, while technically leaving the way open for a fideist escape from the philosophical conundrum posed by the witch question, placed the overwhelming weight of his analysis on its natural ingredients, with natural melancholy comprising the chief one. Driving this disjunctive trend in Renaissance philosophy was an increasing recognition of an ontological and epistemological split severing the body from the soul—or, put another way, the object perceived from the subject doing the perceiving—which no longer could be bridged by the kind of synthetical overview forged by Ficino. Basing their opinions on renewed readings of original Greek texts, Platonists and Aristotelians alike increasingly fostered such variant interpretations

about life's mysteries, with the enigma of human genius a salient case in point, as to encourage the kinds of doubts about the possibility of achieving a philosophical consensus serving as grist for the skeptic's mill.

The basic disagreement between the competing philosophical schools of Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Pyrrhonian skepticism over the origin and nature of genius, it should be clear from the foregoing evidence, did not arise out of differences over the divine origin of human genius any more than out of differences over the divine origin of the immortal soul with which it is intrinsically bound. It arose, rather, from conflicting views as to whether reason, faith, or their harmonious combination are best able to elucidate the enigma of genius. Concerning the last-mentioned of these possibilities, we should not be surprised to learn that the synthesized version of melancholy genius popularized by the Florentine Platonists did not simply die away with emergence of philosophical extremists like Pomponazzi and Gianfrancesco Pico. On the contrary, as will be established in subsequent chapters, it was to be turned into a European-wide vogue, the residuals which are still present with us in our modern notions of genial alienation. Ficino, as time was to tell, would find numerous Renaissance beneficiaries of his theories who, in defiance of the polarizing trend within philosophy fostered by the foregoing divisive developments, reconfirmed the scholastically derived presumption that, just as faith seeks rational understanding, so does supernaturally inspired genius seek a natural auxiliary in the melancholy humor.

As likewise demonstrated by post-Ficinian developments, however, the subject of subsequent chapters in this study, also in place was an interlacing of scholarly attitudes tending to subvert the philosophical edifice constructed by Ficino, of which a theory of demonically and divinely inspired melancholy genius constitutes an epistemological keystone. As highlighted in the present chapter, some stumbling blocks to the Ficinian genial theory lay within rather than without the parameters of formal philosophical theories. Other stumbling blocks, however—most notably, as indicated in our opening chapter, the disciplines of medicine, theology, and humanist literature—formally lay outside parameters of philosophy proper even as they helped to condition its hierarchical categories.

The predictable effect of the first of these impeding disciplines, corporeal medicine, is to treat melancholy in all its forms as a natural disease; the effect of the second discipline, theology, to treat melancholy

in its worst-case scenario as of potential diabolical use, and in its best-case scenario as intrinsically insufficient to meet the infinite demands of God; and the effect of the third discipline, humanism, to treat melancholy as the result of violating the imperative for human sociability and moderation of the passions. Before broaching on further developments within the philosophical traditions pertinent to the genius question, accordingly, we need first take stock of a persisting resistance to the entire debate over the origin of genius in each of the above-stated fields of endeavor—this by reason of their structural emphasis on subordinating genial aspirations to medical, theological, and humanist norms governing human behavior. As will also be revealed in this regard, however, just as in the antecedent cases with which we opened this study, the restraints imposed by these three disciplinary traditions on a doctrine of melancholy genius were not always firmly applied. Just as the medical, theological, and humanist perspectives on human behavior sometimes left room for genial exceptions to their prescriptive rules at an earlier stage of Renaissance thought, so did they sometimes continue to do so once the vogue of melancholy genius was in full swing.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSISTING OBSTACLES TO A THEORY OF MELANCHOLY GENIUS IN THE LATER RENAISSANCE

A. *The Medical Obstacles*

A monograph on melancholy by the late cinquecento Paduan physician Ercole Sassonia (= Hercules de Saxonia, 1550–1607) opens with words indicating that its author was mindful of more than a physiological aspect of the remedial function. “The human mind,” declared Sassonia, “by the consent of all men, is born for divine knowledge, wisdom, art, and prudence. And, as Ficino declared, it has been endowed with the love of immortal and mortal things.”¹ But whereas the basic thrust of the Ficinian approach to psychic alienation was to put natural melancholy to the service of a mind so preconditioned to transcend its physical attributes, the basic thrust of Sassonia’s approach, which owed principally to medical rather than to philosophical considerations, was rather to disencumber the soul of melancholic obstacles to transcendence. In this capacity Sassonia conceived his remedial calling as fundamentally differentiated from, while still complementary to, that of the theologians. While maintaining a legitimate role for his medical practice in the treatment of psychic alienation, Sassonia took care, in his professional role as a physician of the body, to steer clear of encroaching on the divinely sanctioned role of the theologians as physicians of the soul.

On one side of the religious ledger, that of demonology, Sassonia allowed, on one hand, that “many melancholics believe that they are demons, even though they are not, or that they are possessed by demons,” and, on the other hand, that demons are capable of attacking the minds of men either with or without the aid of

¹ Ercole Sassonia (= Hercules de Saxonia), *De melancholia* (Venice: Apud Alexandrum Polum, 1620), cap. 1, p. 5. On Sassonia, see Thorndike, *History of Magic*, VIII, p. 504, and Schleiner, *Melancholy*, p. 50. Though his name implies Germanic lineage, Sassonia, best known to the English speaking world through references in Richard Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, was born and died in Padua.

melancholy.² Accordingly, as to the question of how a victim of purported demonic enchantment is to be treated, he enjoined that “if the manner is a natural cause, it must be counteracted by natural remedies. But if it is beyond nature (*si sit supra naturam*), the physicians labor over this thing in vain.”³ On the other side of the religious ledger, this time under the heading of “heroical” love melancholy, Sassonia similarly forced a choice between the medical and theological responses to psychic alienation. Noting that Avicenna “placed in this class equally those who love human things and those who love divine ones,” Sassonia commented with regard to the latter: “I, nevertheless, believe this to be impious. For if holy men flee the customs of society and are sometimes observed to exist outside themselves (*extra seipsos*), they do this . . . so that they might enjoy God in His role as the most exalted object of all things.”⁴ What Sassonia fails to explain in this criticism of Avicenna is how the Arabic physician’s attribution of love melancholy to lovers of human and divine objects alike essentially differs from Ficino’s characterization of a soul innately “endowed with the love of immortal and mortal things.”

The core bipolar syndrome of melancholy recognized by late Renaissance physicians was fundamentally unchanged from the syndrome bequeathed by the ancient Greeks Hippocrates and Galen and transmitted through their medieval and early Renaissance heirs. As Giovanni Battista da Monte (= Montanus, 1498–1552), in his *Consultationes medicae*, put this bipolar syndrome in summary form: “If one is fearful and sorrowful without apparent cause, that is a common sign of melancholy.”⁵ Also unchanged for these physicians was their belief that its mainspring consists of an over-extended imagination triggering, besides the primary symptoms of fear and sorrow, a number of undesirable secondary symptoms, among them the fantasizing of things which do not truly exist and, in many cases, are not even able to exist; inordinate passions; and an attraction to dark and solitary places. These and other like symptoms attested for the

² *Ibid.*, cap. 5, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, cap. 4, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵ Giovanni Battista da Monte [= Johannes Baptista Montanus Veronensis], *Consultationes medicae* (Basel: Per Henrichum Petri, et Petram Pernam, 1572), cons. 26, col. 62. Da Monte’s practice was principally carried out at Padua. This work was previously issued, under the variant title *Consultationum medicarum opus*, in 1565. For the relevant Galenic citation see above, p. 15n.

medical writers to the melancholic's preference for a world of make-believe over the real one.

A typical representative of such a diagnosis was Benedetto Vettori (1481–1562), who, in his *Consilia medicinalia*, set forth as a distinctive mark of melancholics “an inordinately exerted and fixed deliberation (*cogitatio multa & fixa*) that does not correspond to what is in the real world (*in re ipsa*).”⁶ Another characteristic symptom of melancholics pointed up by Vettori, betraying a misanthropic trait on their part, is an overweaning attraction to solitude where they are enabled to phantasize with a minimum of distraction; as he noted in his *Practicae magnae . . . de morbis curandis*, with Galen his express authority: “Melancholics in their sadness perpetually seek out the darkness, flee the light, hold the customs of men in hatred, are suspicious of all things, and enjoy solitary places.”⁷

One of the more prominent kinds of melancholy recognized by Vettori as a cause of such “an inordinantly exerted and fixed deliberation,” we should not be surprised to find, is that instigated by the passion of love. In this regard, it goes without saying, he found it encumbant to distinguish between the pathological form of love which was the object of his regimens and non-pathological love which Plato, among others, praised as a gift of God. Declaring the infirm form of love melancholy to be “not from a divine, but rather from a human affection,” Vettori insisted that, so far as it corresponds to anything spoken of by the theologians, it is not divine love to which it refers, nor even to that affection praised by the moral philosophers as “honest love, that is, the love of the virtues, fraternal love, and the love of a father towards his son;” it is rather, he insisted, “a species of sordid and vicious love, which Augustine, in his tract *De amicitia*, termed lust (*libidinem*).”⁸ But whereas Augustine, with Plato his philosophical guide, viewed such ignoble love as a favored inroad for the demons, Vettori, taking his lead from Galen rather than from Plato, chose to stay within a strictly physiological framework for its assessment without entering into its wider theological implications.⁹

⁶ Benedetto Vettori, *Consilia medicinalia, ad varia morborum genera* (Venice: Ex officina Stellae, 1556), cons. 16: “Ad melancholiam,” fol. 154^r.

⁷ Vettori, *Practicae magnae . . . de morbis curandis*, 2 vols. (Venice: Apud Vincentium Valgrisium, 1562), lib. I, cap. 14, p. 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 12, p. 78.

⁹ For a recent study of the variant ethical implications of these two positions marking out the late Renaissance medical community, one maintaining underlying linkage between theological and physiological imperatives and another separating

If the disease of melancholy was principally linked by the medical writers to the faculty of the imagination, its cure, in corresponding fashion, rested for them in the faculty of reason held by them as responsible for imposing discipline on the imagination. Typifying this answer to melancholy alienation was the Genovese physician Giovanni Francesco Arma (16th cent.), who, after designating an excessive imagination (*nimia imaginatio*) as a leading cause of melancholy in his *De tribus capitis affectibus*, prescribed as its appropriate remedy the moderating of the imagination by reason.¹⁰ Whereas various humanist writers were contemporaneously counseling an identical call to moderation with support from the physicians, a theme to be revisited in the following section, Arma reciprocally supported his views with help from the traditions of literary humanism. Thus, urging his readers “to abstain from a great number and variety of senses, affections, imaginations, opinions, and similar passions which do injury to the mind and pervert the judgment of reason,” Arma reinforced his advice with words from Cicero and Horace. “If I remember correctly,” reported Arma, “Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations* termed these passions infirmities and pestiferous sicknesses of the mind, whereas Horace called them frenzies and insanities.”¹¹

The key role assigned by the Renaissance medical writers to the melancholic imagination, we earlier observed, placed them in a position of potential collaboration with another group of scholars also fixed on the dangers of a melancholy imagination, the demonologists. A philosophical way of characterizing that collaboration was to present demons as the efficient cause of an alienation of the mind for which the melancholy humor served as the appropriate material cause. However, as we have likewise demonstrated from the earlier medical literature, the meeting of medical with theological theory could as readily prove to be confrontational as collaborative, with the medical writer looking for an efficient cause of melancholy, not in the supernatural realm addressed by the theologians, but in a natural realm independent of purported supernatural encroachments.

their spheres, see Schleiner, *Medical Ethics in the Renaissance*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995, esp. pp. 20 ff. Whereas Schleiner, however, tends to draw the primary line of demarcation between Jewish and Christian diagnoses of melancholy, the demarcative line here drawn is between medical and theological diagnoses independent of religious affiliations.

¹⁰ Giovanni Francesco Arma, *De tribus capitis affectibus, sive: De phrenetide, mania, & melancholia liber* (Torino: Apud Martinum Cravottum & socios, 1573), fol. 45^v.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 61^r.

As earlier observed, a foremost prior authority lending credence to the latter view of melancholy by the medical writers was Avicenna.

"As Avicenna testifies," observed Da Monte in this connection, "the effect of adust melancholy is to induce those called demoniacs to flee their fellow men by seeking out solitude and hovering around tombs."¹² Similarly enlisting Avicenna for this purpose was Girolamo Mercuriale (1530–1606), who maintained that a melancholy imagination possesses such incredible power, "first by thoroughly altering the body and then the complete mind," as to produce results believed by the rudely schooled to be caused by demons.¹³ To be sure, in making this point Mercuriale was mindful that he was treading on dangerous theological ground. What is striking about his treatment of this question, however, is that, rather than meekly subordinating his physiological diagnosis to that of the theologically conditioned demonologists, he boldly contraposed it, with Avicenna's help, to that of the demonologists.

"In truth that which always makes me anxious," Mercuriale yielded to the theologians, "is the question of why the functions of a certain type of depraved imagination revolve more around things relating to religion than to other things." Even more directly pertinent to the witch hysteria going around him when he wrote those words, he noted that one specialized way in which such an impaired imagination often expressed itself, the penchant for demon-envisioning, "is especially to be noted in women." But the gender aside of the person displaying the said symptoms, Mercuriale took sharp issue with the interpretation placed on it by the theologians "that the Devil (*Daemonem*) takes pleasure in assailing the sick by the use of this humor, readily casting them into religious error and despair."¹⁴ In express refutation of this view Mercuriale responded: "Our Hippocrates and Avicenna related that all the vulgar men of their age (*temporibus ipsorum vulgares omnes*) were accustomed to think of melancholy, and in turn call it, a demon."¹⁵ The implication here is that the demonologists deserved classification among the *vulgares* as readily as those whose imaginations they stirred up into believing they could converse

¹² Da Monte, *Consilia medica omnia* (Nuremberg: Apud Johannem Montanum, & Ulricum Neuberum, 1559), consil. 18, fol. xix^r.

¹³ Girolamo Mercuriale, *Consultationes et responsa medicinalia*, 4 vols. (Venice: Apud Juntas, 1624), IV, cons. 41, p. 89.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, cons. 99, p. 162.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, cons. 41, p. 89.

with demons. Viewed from Mercuriale's Galen-based vantage point, reinforced by the Aristotelian philosophical perspective dominating at Padua where he occupied a chair in medicine, the mental alienation attributed by the theologians to supernatural demons is more credibly attributed to the natural cause of melancholy.

Medical writers like De Monte and Mercuriale, then, while generally not of a mind to confront the theologians head-on in this matter, presented what could as readily be construed by their readers as a natural alternative to the the theological explanation for melancholy alienation. Viewed in this manner, melancholy, rather than assuming a role as a natural mediator of objectively existing supernatural evil spirits as the demonologists would have us believe, can be taken to comprise a wholly natural explanation for the phantasizing of demons. The logical inference to be drawn from this way of looking on melancholy, even when put in a less openly combative way than that of some of its more philosophically minded proponents, is to remove the Platonic pillars sustaining the demonic thesis.

From a medically based perspective of the kind indicated above, demon phantasizing is a special case of an imagination untempered by the bridle of reason—a point of view placing not only a Peripatetically formulated doctrine of melancholy genius on the defensive, but also a Platonically formulated doctrine of divine frenzy philosophically bound up with the demonological outlook. The thrust of this strictly prescriptive way of thinking, which holds physiological balance and symmetry to be a basic criterion of health, is conversely to consider the imbalance and assymetry characteristically associated with genial alienation to be symptomatic of disease. From this point of view genial alienation, no matter in what form it might appear, would better be put to the remedies of the physicians than be exempted from those remedies by the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophers.

Of the Renaissance medical writers drawing this lesson from the demon issue, especially instructive for our purposes is Giano Matteo Durastante (16th cent.) in the first of three queries put to him by a curious acquaintance asking “whether, according to the opinions of the theologians, the philosophers, and the physicians, demons exist, and whether, if they do exist, they cause diseases?”¹⁶ At the heart

¹⁶ Giano Matteo Durastante [= Janus Matthaëus Durastantes], *Problemata* (Venice: Ex officina Stellae, Jordanae Ziletti, 1567), title page: “I. Daemones an sint, & an morborum sint causae, pro theologorum, philosophorum, & medicorum sententiis.”

of the Platonic philosophical outlook, according to Durastante, lies a demonic system of causation, including within it a demonic explanation for health as well as of disease. Pertaining to the first cause, he noted, the Platonists speak of good demons (*eudaimones*) which, they claim, maintain body and soul in a state of perpetual equilibrium, in which capacity they "understand, and teach upright men, the contemplative, moral, and mechanical arts and sciences."¹⁷ Conversely, according to Durastante, the Platonists theorize the existence of bad demons (*cacodaimones*) perversely conditioned to throw both body and soul into states of unbalanced extremes. Taking an opposite position on the same question, Durastante continued, are the Aristotelians, who, knowing demons "neither through their discipline nor through their intellect," deny their existence altogether.¹⁸ By rejecting a belief in the existence of demons, Durastante added the obvious, the Aristotelians also necessarily rejected the possibility of a demonic influence on human behavior. From this Peripatetic point of view natural melancholy better than supernatural spirits explained the kinds of alienated behavior attributed to demoniacs.

Of these two principal philosophical versions of mental alienation it was clearly the second, Peripatetic one that most closely accorded with Durastante's medical training. At the same time, however, Durastante did not want to foreclose the opposing, Platonically conceived, possibility that supernatural demons might ultimately lie behind the natural causes of alienation posited by the Aristotelians. But while, from his admittedly limited vantage point, leaving his readers in limbo regarding what he viewed as at bottom an unanswerable metaphysical dispute over the causes of disease, Durastante nevertheless found the wisdom of the philosophers to coincide with the findings of his medical theory on a fundamental point—one, it happens, also shared by the leading humanist writers and artists of the Renaissance.¹⁹

The dedicatee is the current duke of Urbino, Guidobaldo, and the poser of the questions, a certain Matteo Gentile (= Matthaëus Gentilis Sanctogenesiensis), in a query dated Jan. 21, 1560. Taking Durastante to task for his pretenses in this tract is Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 517–19, esp. p. 518, maintaining that its author "opens his reply with the statement that he is about to write 'many novel and marvelous things concerning their (*viz*, demons') essence, qualities, and effects,' but this promise he scarcely fulfills."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, prob. I, lib. I, cap. 2, fol. 16'.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, prob. I, lib. III, fols. 40"–41'.

¹⁹ It is not by chance that the addressee of Durastante's tract, prince Guidobaldo della Rovere of Urbino, belonged to a notable line of humanist patrons in the

The common thread linking Durastante's medical theory with Renaissance humanist theory consists of the premise that all tendencies toward the immoderate, disharmonious, and asymmetrical in human behavior are also tendencies toward the infirm, whereas, conversely, all tendencies toward moderation (*mediocritas*), harmony (*concininitas*), and symmetry (*symmetria*) are tendencies toward corporeal and mental health. As confirmed by Galen, wrote Durastante, "health is a certain symmetry, and disease, asymmetry (*Sanitas symmetria quaedam est; aegritudo igitur ametria*)." Or as he expressed the same idea another way: "Since health is a certain moderation, it follows that all immoderate tendencies which depart from the mean result in illnesses."²⁰ The Galenic premise invoked here to support Durastante's concept of mental alienation is that bodily health calls for a balance of the natural humors, with disease ensuing when that balance is disturbed. The corresponding philosophical injunctions to this medical regimen, as previously established, are the Aristotelian call for moderation in all things, and the Pythagorean-Platonic call for musical harmony in soul and body in resonance with the larger universal harmonies. Durastante's interest in philosophy, however, was largely confined to its part in confirming his medical remedies, the key corroboration residing in the mandate shared by medicine and philosophy for a harmonious accord of body and mind. So far as extraneous philosophical issues entered into his thinking, they were submerged in the larger question posed by his profession of how to maintain corporeal health in accordance with the prescriptive guidelines of Hippocrates and Galen. His was the medical correlative of the contemporary humanist call for moderation and balance in the social and ethical spheres of human life.

If Durastante's counsel of physiological and psychological equilibrium can be said to have put him into common cause with the humanists of his day, a special application he gave to this call, his counsel for equilibrium between the active and contemplative lives, seals his alliance with the humanists even more tightly. "We are made busy so that we can rest in leisure," as Durastante echoed this

proud tradition of the earlier Montefeltros. A fitting architectural paragon for the moral and aesthetic ideal praised by Durastante as the mark of corporeal and mental health, *harmonia, seu concinnitas*, has been left to posterity in the ducal palace at Urbino.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, prob. I, lib. V, fol. 63^r. Cf. fol. 63^v: "Vel sanitas est, harmonia, seu concinnitas; constituentium hominem, calidorum, frigidorum, humidorum, & siccorum. Quod, eorundem, & symmetria sanitatis, & ametria aegritudinum, causae sint. . ."

commonplace theme of the Renaissance humanists, "much as we wage war so that we might live in peace."²¹ Conversely, the life of leisure can be constructively employed to further the activistic goals of the community. Carried to immoderate lengths, on the other hand, either of these life styles can lead to infirmity, the most characteristic manifestation of which is melancholy.

If, then, one indication of this underlying commensuration between Durastante's brand of medicine and humanism lay in his prescription of moderation and balance in all things, another lay in his presumption of an inherently social proclivity of the human being. Only an equitable union of these ways of life, Durastante determined, is able to put melancholy to flight. The significance of this outlook for the genial question is that it leaves little room to maneuver for the articulation of a theory of melancholy genius. To leave that door open, if we are to follow the strict guidelines of the medical profession, is to throw off the equilibrium considered, by a consensus of the medical writers, to be a *sine qua non* of corporeal and psychological health. While it is true that Durastante did not expressly exclude genial exceptions to the prescriptive rules of his medical theory, whether these be expressed in the supernaturalist language of Plato or the naturalist language of Aristotle, he must be counted among the physicians of his day who, in agreement with a foremost humanist motif, placed physiological obstacles in the way of their acceptance in either philosophical version.

As illustrated by the above examples, with the demon question most conspicuously forcing the issue, corporeal medicine has ingrained in its practice the predilection to consider immediate causes independently of claimed remote ones. Whereas the demonologists subjected melancholy to supernatural demons, the physicians, so far as they remained true to the guidelines of their profession, reversed the order of the demon-melancholy relationship by investing in melancholy a proclivity for demon-phantasizing. Conversely, so far as physicians agreed to reach for diagnostic explanations to a realm existing beyond their limited natural one, they effectively gave their assent to the cooptation of their profession by the demonologists. If they hesitated to accept some of the more extreme demonological propositions, they tended to express their reluctance obliquely rather than outspokenly. And even so far as the Renaissance physicians did

²¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 72^v.

summon courage to contest those propositions, their opposition was generally shaped more by the empirical demands of their profession than by a theoretical posturing.

Nevertheless, even when a given Renaissance physician firmly held to the diagnostic guidelines of his profession, he still could find some precedence for treating the condition of melancholy with a certain equivocalness. For while accepting that their regimens operated in a sphere inferior to that of the theologians, the medical writers were also sometimes compelled into the admission, even as they attempted to keep to their lesser turf, that they were not necessarily seeing the whole picture. It was in light of this humble acceptance of the limitations of their profession that physicians at times found themselves, not in conflict with the demonologists as might be expected, but in their confederation.²²

Beyond the possibility of a demonic cause behind a given state of psychic alienation, a further cause for medical equivocalness towards melancholy lay in the possibility that physicians should take into account certain genial exemptions to their therapeutic mandate. Viewed in this light, a cure of melancholy could also mean the thwarting of genial proficiencies latently present in the humor causing it. Much as the medieval and early Renaissance medical theorists occasionally permitted genial exceptions to their prescribed methods, so did their cinquecento successors. An example is the earlier-cited Mercuriale, who, in his *Consultationes medicae*, indicated something less than uncompromising hostility to the black humor when he allowed in passing that it makes men “not only insane and forgetful, but also very wise (*sapientissimos faciat*).”²³ Another example, illustrating that a more auspicious view of melancholy did not necessarily depend on the Platonic revival for its philosophical redemption, is the Genoan physician Pietro Andrea Canoniero (d. ca. 1620).

Entering into this question under the familiar heading “heroic love” in his *De curiosa doctrina*, Canoniero revealed therein that it was not Ficino’s revamped version of *amor heroicus* that conditioned his

²² See, e.g., Leland L. Estes, “The Medical Origins of the European Witchcraze: A Hypothesis,” *Journal of Social History*, 17 (1983), 271–84. Carrying this thesis into the post-Renaissance centuries is Oskar Diethelm, “The Medical Teaching of Demonology in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 6 (1970), 3–15.

²³ Mercuriale, *Consultationes*, IV, cons. 41, p. 89. For explicit confirmation of Mercuriale’s conversance with the relevant section of the Aristotelian *Problemata* (XXX, 1), see II, cons. 36, p. 85.

thinking, but a pre-Ficinian version of the medieval Spanish physician Arnaldus of Villanova (ca. 1225–1311) finding in the prince of the realm a consummation of its tempestuous aspirations. Given that such overweening love “properly pertains to a lord (*quasi dominalis*),” Canoniero parroted Arnaldus, heroic love “is so-called not only because it befalls one who rules, but because, as he rules, it subjects his soul and commands his heart.”²⁴ Occasional acknowledgements like these by the medical writers that there might be occultly couched in melancholy certain salutary powers in uneasy coexistence with its well-known deleterious ones, while antedating the Florentine Platonic revival, made it easier for those caught up in its currents to liberate melancholy from the regulative straitjacket thrust upon it by conventional medical theory. Put another way, as relevant to pre-Ficinian as post-Ficinian medical thinking: ever lurking beneath the surface of the prescriptive injunctions of the physicians was the license granted a genial few, on the model of the ancient heroes, to burst the restraining bonds imposed on the mediocre many. The main thrust of this genre of letters, however, was to focus, not on the possibility of rare genial exceptions to the rules of communal interrelatedness and moderation in all things, but rather on the obligation of the vast majority of men to submit to those rules.

Complicating the intersections of the three disciplines notably hemming in the debate over the origin of genius during the later Renaissance—corporeal medicine, theology, and humanism—was the ever more prominent appearance of an occultly formulated, Hermetic form of medical regimen conceived as a radical alternative to the traditional Hippocratic-Galenic one. In 1586 Pope Sixtus V, in the bull *Coeli et terrae* condemning judicial astrology as contrary to the dogma of free will, in conjunction also prohibited various magical practices deemed to rely on astrology—this not only because of the Church’s strictures against fatalism, but also because such magical practices were widely believed to enlist demons for the effectuation of their goals.²⁵ So far as this bull, reflecting the stricter climate of

²⁴ Pietro Andrea Canoniero, *De curiosa doctrina libri quinque* (Florence: Apud Volmarium Timan Germanum, 1607), lib. II, cap. 23, pp. 213, 218. Cf. Arnaldus de Villanova, *De amore heroico*, cap. I, in *Opera omnia* (Basel: Ex officina Pernea per Conradum Vualdkirch, 1585), cols. 1525, 528. On Arnaldus’ general medical theories see Thorndike, *Magic*, II, pp. 841 ff., and on his doctrine of love melancholy in particular, Lowes, “Loveres Maladye of Hereos,” pp. 5–7.

²⁵ See, e.g., Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 156, and Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, p. 54.

the Catholic reform movement, can be said to have impacted on the magical fad, however, it was more in the way of making the apologists of the arcana more circumspect in the way they justified occult studies than in discouraging them altogether. In this regard Sixtus' 1586 bull was as notable for what it permitted as for what it forbade, in the matter of prophecy, as one case in point, leaving intact the legitimacy of prediction from natural signs reputedly resting on laws of probability rather than of fatalistic necessity, and in the matter of magic leaving intact the legitimacy of marvel working that depended, not on demonic powers, but on powers occultly residing in nature. And of the kinds of marvel working that Renaissance Hermeticists tended to appropriate to themselves, a leading one was the working of cures in the infirm.

The occult offshoot of Renaissance medicine in this later Renaissance expression discloses much the same kind of tense conflict between natural and supernatural demands on the human being as does the conventional Galenic mainstream, in so doing betraying an underlying discrepancy between corporeal and spiritual needs. Distinguishing themselves from the representatives of conventional Galenic medicine, however, the advocates of Hermetic medicine, some of whom took their inspiration from the writings of the German itinerant magician Paracelsus von Hohenheim (ca. 1493–1541), claimed to move in sequential order from material to spiritual layers of the human psyche.²⁶ At the first stage in this ascending sequence Hermetic principles furnished what their exponents believed to be a more reliable means than the conventional Galenic form for purging the body of a melancholic inroad to the demons, and at a second stage they demonstrated their ability to participate fully in the late Renaissance vogue of melancholy genius. In so doing, we will see, its spokesmen gave a revolutionary magical rendering to the mystical and prophetic conceptions of spiritual ecstasy and illumination. If, in the context of the present chapter, one of their prominent intentions was to expunge melancholy from the body as a principal means of access to the demons, another, the subject of the next chapter, was to press into the service of their occult program the “magical” powers of melancholy for which Ficino had pointed the way.

²⁶ Concerning this innovative mystical development in medicine see Thorndike, *Magic*, V, 438–44; Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Basel: S. Karger, 1958), passim; Walker, *Magic*, pp. 96 ff.; and Schumaker, *Occult Sciences*, pp. 182 ff.

* * *

A late cinquecento example of one adopting a Hermetic approach to disease was the Brescian physician Giovanni Francesco Olmo (fl. 1580), who, under the title *De occultis in re medica proprietatibus*, prescribed as one of the more effective antidotes against melancholy, together with the demons invariably found in its association, the "occult" powers of music.²⁷ Similarly addressing himself to what he considered to be a dual melancholy-demon problem was the Milanese physician Francesco Gerosa (fl. 1600), who, through his spokesman Giocondo (= Cheerfulness, a foil to Tristino = Sadness), characterized melancholy in his dialogue *La magia trasformatrice dell'huomo* as "a diabolical vexation, tormenter of human nature by means of the malignant spirits, witchcraft, and bewitchments, and other similar diabolical influences." In elaboration Gerosa contended that "human remedies are salutary in addition to the divine ones because, besides the remedy by good and holy religious men prompted without concern for money, the corporeal medicine produced by us also sometimes, though not always, puts [the evil spirits] to flight."²⁸

As this pitch on behalf of his Hermetic remedies implies, Gerosa, while perceiving an exorcistical benefit to his medical art, held it still to fall short of that applied by the theologians. Thus, in those instances in which theologians concluded that there existed "a diabolical impression" (*impresa diabolica*) in the mind of a melancholic, Gerosa conceded that, in his role as physician, "I ceased from my remedy and consigned my efforts to the hands of religious men suitable to the tasks, inasmuch as those unworldly and malignant spirits required routing by spiritual remedies."²⁹ The intent that lay behind Gerosa's brand of magical medicine as here expressed, it would appear, was not substantially different from that of a Galenist like his contemporary Ercole Sassonia, who also, we noted at the outset of the present chapter, conceived of his therapeutic role as one complementing the demon-purging role of the theologians. So far as the Hermetic and Galenic medical theorists divided in this matter, it was not in

²⁷ Francesco Olmo (= Ulmus), *De occultis in re medica proprietatibus libri quattuor* (Brescia: Ex typographia Comini Praesenij, 1597), lib. II, cap. 12: "De occultis musicae viribus in tollendis morbis: & qua ratione curatis animis curentur & corpora quandoque," pp. 74 ff. On Olmo see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 230-35.

²⁸ Francesco Gerosa, *La magia trasformatrice dell'huomo a miglior stato. . .* (Bergamo: Per Comino Ventura, 1608), p. 82. On this tract see Thorndike, *Magic*, VII, 277.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

the end of curing the body of demon-attracting melancholy, but only in the means they chose to reach that end. Of those means, Gerosa countered the traditional Galenic remedies with a remedy distilled through the operations of alchemy.

“With the key in hand of the chemical art,” Gerosa exulted in this regard, “are opened these nearly divine treasures of the mistress nature, which she has created for human health and enclosed in pure and salutary spirits.” More specifically, “this teaches us how to prepare the fifth essences against every type of curable infirmity, the vivifying elixirs, the consolidating balsam, the most precious potable gold, the health-giving stone of the philosophers, rediscovered by them with great industry and perspiration for the benefit of man.”³⁰ Accordingly, with an eye to a possible demonological explanation for the melancholic affliction of Tristino in conjunction with the corporeal one, Gerosa had him entreat his friend Giocondo, with access to these “divine treasures of the mistress nature,” to act as his physician and “relieve me of these melancholy humors.”³¹

Another late Renaissance physician subscribing to what he believed to be a higher form of occult medicine than the conventional Galenic form, the Paduan Prospero Alpino (1553–1617), claimed to have been instructed in his remedies during travels in the deserts of the east. Summarizing the fruits of that journey in his *De medicina Aegyptiorum*, composed in dialogue form with himself as one of its protagonists, Alpino revealed therein that the eastern desert sages were intent on curing more than maladies of the body. They were also intent on curing maladies of the soul for which the corporeal regimens were but preliminary to spiritual ones. Whereas the Hermetic medicine of Olmo and Gerosa was more modestly presented as complementary to the higher spiritual medicine of the theologians, the medicine of Alpino rather appears to have fully appropriated the theological function unto itself.

When broaching on the subject of melancholy, conceded Alpino, the Egyptian sages who had instructed him in its principles were intimately conversant with that of which they spoke. For their marvel-working medicine, Alpino acknowledged, having been acquired through arduous mental and spiritual exertion in solitary removal from society, was itself the product of a melancholic condition arising from

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

those same solitary conditions. That solitary labors of the mind could well result in melancholy, then, did not pose an argument against their value for Alpino. Rather, they underscored for him the excruciating nature of the conditions preparatory to the distillation of occult wisdom—a wisdom which, in turn, is able to provide a therapeutic means for the amelioration of melancholy suffering.

Thus, in response to the avowal of his protagonist that, concerning the Egyptian desert where Alpino had passed his time, “I know that many melancholics are found there whom many people believe to be holy,” the writer not only heartily agreed with this assessment but went on to enlarge on it. In the solitary retreats of the east, attested Alpino, “live countless men who have vowed to lead a life completely from sins, and are esteemed to possess holiness.” Having rejected the communal life, “these live in severe places, serving God in the manner of hermits.” Outwardly exhibiting bodies “which are dark, squalid, and thin, resembling the thoroughly dried-out bodies of mummies,” Alpino observed, they inwardly suffer tortuous psychic distress. Calling the members of all religions to account for their errors and cautioning them “that the world of man is wretched,” they themselves “always appear sorrowful, expecting many punishments from God on account of the disgraceful acts of mortals.” The stringent rigors of such a way of life, Alpino pointed out, necessarily produce the severe physiological reaction termed melancholy by the physicians. More specifically, “these become melancholic as a result of having become consumed by natural heat arising from the immoderate torridness of the environment, from a very delicate nourishment, and from many assiduous vigils and labors.”³²

The position taken here, it will be noted, stands at the opposite pole from that taken a century earlier by Platina, who had expressed a pronounced preference for the civic-minded Romans over the solitude-seeking Egyptian lovers of the arcana. It also stands at the opposite pole from a fellow physician like Durastante who, along conventional Galenic lines, incorporated a comparable civic-based view of the human being into his medical regimen. At the same time, however, still putting it into possible opposition to the vogue of melancholy genius, it stops short of a transformation of the black bile from an impediment to an auxiliary of the *vita solitaria*.

³² Prospero Alpino, *De medicina aegyptiorum libri quatuor* (Paris: Apud Nicolaum Redelichuyesen, 1645), cap. 14, fol. 26^v.

To the extent that melancholy is treated in such tracts as something more than a mere demon-attractor, as in Alpino's recognition that it was a familiar visitor to the solitary cerebrations of his Egyptian teachers, it is still viewed more as a dreaded price to be paid for such occult speculations than a desired means to their effectuation. However, rarely did Hermeticists of the stripe of Olmo, Gerosa, and Alpino stop with a mere medical conclusion to their occult interests. Their aim was generally a higher spiritual one. A more distant object of their speculations lay in bridging, through the art of magic, the finite and infinite realms of existence. So far as they could agree with Ficino that melancholy shares with magic marvel-working occult powers that can assist them in traversing the abyss dividing those two realms, they too, as will be established in the next chapter, could discover in the black bile a dual character granting it a spiritually uplifting potential to counter the spiritually debasing one induced by demons.

* * *

The remedial and exorcistical missions of Hermetic medicine, as the above examples illustrate, were as pertinent to the higher spiritual needs of the soul as to the lower physiological needs of the body. In this role they encroached not only on territory traditionally reserved for Galenic medicine, but also on territory traditionally reserved for the church theologians. What is significant for our purposes here, however, are not the controversies thereby enkindled by an underground threat to the officially sanctioned disciplines of medicine and theology. It is rather an inhering alliance between both brands of medicine, Galenic and Hermetic, and the theologians in withstanding the force of the contemporary melancholy vogue.

In accord with the theological perspective in particular, the subject of the next section, certain of the Renaissance occultists detected in their art more than an alternative road to curing the bodily infirmities. They conceived as their task, on the model of spiritual exercises, the passage of the the soul through a series of magical purifications from a lower to a higher state of spiritual being. To the extent that they held true to their dual role as physicians of the soul as well as the body, working as a kind of underground movement at the juncture of medicine and theology, the Hermeticists joined forces with the majority of mystical theorists of the Catholic reform movement in treating melancholy as something to be avoided rather than encouraged.

Working within channels laid out by centuries of theological presumption that melancholy is capable of servicing impure demons but never the pure Holy Spirit, the majority of mystical theorists working within the guidelines of the Catholic reform movement saw as their goal, not the utilization of melancholy as a positive agent of spiritual ascent, but the systematic eradication of melancholy as a necessary prelude to the eradication of demonically incited sin. In this approach to the melancholy problem the late Renaissance mystics found themselves in common cause with the demonologists, who perceived in melancholy, not a divinely instilled aid to their ardent pursuit of God, but a diabolically favored agent intended to obstruct that pursuit. It is fitting, accordingly, that we introduce the section to follow with an assessment of the characteristic demonological hostility to melancholy surrounding and conditioning the characteristic mystical hostility.

B. *The Theological Obstacles*

In an early cinquecento tract professing to promote spiritual tranquillity in its reader, Isabella Sforza (1471–1524) lamented the spread of a malaise during her day that, as she saw it, constituted a foremost barrier to the state of quiescent well-being she was advancing. At one level, that addressed by the theologians, Sforza accepted that, as noted in a chapter title, “sin, more than any other thing is that which deprives human beings of their tranquillity.” What is significant for our purpose here, however, is that Sforza equipped her theological diagnosis for this widely shared affliction with an accompanying physiological diagnosis. Beginning with Adam and Eve and proceeding to the present day, she reported, “the conscience disturbs and disquiets human beings, rendering them, above all else, melancholics.”³³

Sforza’s complaint about the widespread dissemination of a condition which she identified as religious melancholy, by her own account, pertains as much to one place and age as to another, connoting as it does a sense of extreme spiritual unworthiness and solicitousness about the prospects of salvation knowing no regional or temporal bounds. Distinguishing Sforza’s complaint from others before her, however, like that of her German forerunner Hildegard of Bingen

³³ Isabella Sforza, *Della vera tranquillità dell’animo* (Venice: In Casa de’figliuoli di Aldo, 1544), fol. 47’.

(1098–1179) who similarly had detected a link between sin and melancholy,³⁴ was its pronouncement in the midst of a vogue of melancholy that was contemporaneously flourishing on her native soil. The unhappy result of this vogue, from a theological perspective like that of Sforza, was that, by rationalizing melancholy genius, it perforce also rationalized a favored way of sin-provoking demons to enter into the world in their campaign to enlist an entourage of human confederates.

Of the arguments put forth for the exoneration of sorcerers, a leading one was that the accused were engaging in harmless natural magic. From the viewpoint of the demonologists, however, this argument only begged the question, since, they reasoned, demons are as capable of coming into contact with human beings through nature as apart from it. As the Roman inquisitor Paolo Grillando (fl. 1535) succinctly stated this principle in his *De sortilegiis*, first published in 1524 and reprinted many times thereafter: “It is established that the Angel of Satan, who is properly called the Devil, possesses a marvelous cognitive virtue pertaining to natural things and to the secrets of nature (*circa naturalia, et secreta naturae*).”³⁵

A further exonerating argument with which we have also been made familiar, more directly pertinent to the subject at hand, was that those accused of sorcery are really melancholics more in need of the gentle care of physicians than of harsh punishment by the inquisitorial courts. Given, however, that a marvel-working melancholy humor as readily falls under Grillando’s label of “natural things and . . . secrets of nature” as does natural magic, this argument was no more difficult for a demonologist like Grillando to counter than the previous one. A direct consequence of the appropriation of natural magic by the demonologists was their further appropriation of the marvel-working melancholy humor, which they continued to characterize as the Devil’s bath.

As this thesis was bluntly put by the Calabrian demonologist Giovanni Lorenzo d’Anania (16th cent.), demons “invade and occupy not only brute animals, but also human beings, often affecting them

³⁴ See, e.g., Hildegard’s *Causae et curae*, ed. Paul Kaiser (Leipzig: 1903), p. 38, finding the origin of melancholy in original sin. Hildegard was abbess of St. Rupert’s Mount, near Bingen.

³⁵ Paolo Grillando, *Tractatus . . . de sortilegiis*, in *Tractatus duo: unus de sortilegiis D. Pauli Grillandi Castellionis, Jureconsulti Florentini. . . Alter de lamiis . . . D. Joannis Francisci Ponzinibii* (Frankfurt: 1592), quaest. 6, p. 59. Extensively developing this thesis, with Grillando a case in point (p. 165), is Clark, *Thinking with Demons*.

with the melancholy humor." The explanation for this special attraction of demons to melancholy, the writer went on to say, lies in its suitability for deluding the mind through the agency of the imagination. From such melancholy, D'Anania agreed with the medical writers, "are induced horrendous and sorrowful imaginations and foul thoughts, insomnia, and raging cares about obscene and depraved matters." But whereas some might be inclined to see in that admission a cause for mercy in the trial of an accused sorcerer, D'Anania saw in it, given the free will of its melancholy defendant, corroborative evidence for an indictment and conviction. For under the compulsions of melancholy, he asserted, "first words, then deeds burst forth, and from bodies of such a kind, ordained to be temples of God, are fashioned hiding places for the demons (*daemonum . . . latibula*)."³⁶

Further associating melancholy with demonic visitation was a Milanese demonologist, Zaccaria Visconti (fl. 1600), who, however, distinguished himself from his earlier namesake Girolamo by underscoring the similarities rather than differences between melancholy and demonic affliction. In a handbook intended for professional exorcists Visconti gave three main reasons why melancholy is highly adaptable to the artifices of the demons: the first reason, that melancholy "is inherently disobedient and rebellious in those striving to expunge it from themselves," a quality of obvious utility to comparably disobedient and rebellious demons; the second reason, that the sufferer, "failing in his mind, negligent and oblivious regarding those things pertaining to his health, and succumbing to bitterness, sorrow, and turbulence, is made an abode appropriate for the demons;" and the third reason, that, under the cloak of a mere natural affliction, the demons are more easily able to contrive their treacheries uncontested by the theologians. In further elucidation of the last-named *ratio*, Visconti explained that "in the said natural infirmities the demon is very often wont to conceal itself—this because there generally concur in these diseases signs and accidents similar to those the demon itself is inclined to effect."³⁷

The urgency that Visconti felt in making his case, by his own acknowledgment, was heightened by an opposing argument taking

³⁶ Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania, *De natura daemonum . . . libri quatuor* (Venice: Apud Aldum, 1589), lib. III, p. 124. On D'Anania's demonology see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 527–28.

³⁷ Zaccaria Visconti, *Complementum artis exorcisticae* (Venice: Apud Franciscum Barilettum, 1600), pp. 23–25. On this tract see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 558.

a far more lenient view of demoniacs than his own. According to the exponents of this argument, calling for backing from the medical tracts under the melancholic subheading *daemonomania*, the sufferers of melancholy only imagine themselves to be vexed by demons without truly being so. But Visconti's criticism of this view did not mean that he considered the regimens of the physicians to be irrelevant to his higher spiritual regimen. A concession by Visconti to the corporeal physician's part in helping to initiate the exorcistical process, if a modest one, is attested by his acknowledgment that "if the humor should be successfully removed, the demon will be compelled to withdraw." Necessary for the completion of the process, however, Visconti further insisted, is a physician of the soul whose remedial compass transcends the bare material conditions within which demons are able to thrive.

This is not to say that Visconti saw the demonologist as infallible in his diagnosis of every given case of supposed demonic insinuation. It sometimes happens, he conceded, that "the exorcist, thrown into uncertainty as to whether a given infirmity is diabolical or natural, is deceived," the regretful upshot being that "sometimes the demon, whose cunning is not recognized by the exorcist, escapes detection with impunity."³⁸ Whereas, however, from Visconti's higher vantage point, corporeal physicians are condemned to remain mired in this confusion, the theologically knowledgeable exorcists are enabled to rise above it by recourse to a higher medicine of the soul.

Visconti's demonological credulity was not, however, an unlimited one. He took issue, for example with the vulgar rumor that the demon "sometimes transmutes whole bodies or their separate members into bestial forms." For Visconti the viability of demonology did not require a literal belief in the possibility of magical transformations; rather, it was sufficient for his purposes to demonstrate that the demon, by working through the melancholy humor, is able to induce imaginary phantasms that can be mistaken for magical transformations by the uneducated eye. The key to this view lay in his presumption that the principal pathway for the demons into the soul lies in the sense-based imagination, the faculty also most conspicuously affected by the melancholy humor. As put by Visconti, the evil demon, "by virtue of its nature, is able to move a man's imagination through the local motion of the spirits and humors, thereby insti-

³⁸ *Ibid.*

gating within us imaginary apparitions."³⁹ In this capacity, according to Visconti, melancholy "occupies the principal and nobler powers, obscures the mind, intellect, and memory, and disturbs the reason and judgment."⁴⁰

If one consequence of this subversion of the rational faculty for Visconti was a confusion of subjective phantasms with objective reality, another was the goading of the mind into extremes of passion. For by their reputed ability to insinuate themselves into the melancholy humor, declared Visconti, the demons impel their victim "either to inordinate love or to inordinate hate." While granting that "the demon is not directly the cause of inordinate passion by its curtailment of the will of man," a concession which would impiously call into question the doctrine of human freedom, Visconti also acknowledged, the soul willing, that a demon, by means of its power over the imagination, is able to prompt the passions into exceeding the just limits placed on them by reason.⁴¹ Much as, in the matter of free choice, the astrological dictum could be invoked that "the stars do not necessitate, but only incline," so could the corresponding dictum be invoked in Visconti's demonological context that "demons do not necessitate, but only incline."

Another exorcistical specialist to uphold a special attraction of demonic spirits to the melancholy humor, the Franciscan Girolamo Menghi (d. 1610), admonished in his *Flagellum daemonum* that "the demons delight in those things which are melancholy, and have dominion over horrible, solitary, dark and subterranean places; and as lovers of shadows, sorrows, and melancholy, they gladly abide and work their will within them." It followed for Menghi that, just as demons are drawn to dark and solitary places, so are those under their spell, who, "oppressed by the terrors of the impure spirits, are often seen to seek out dark and hidden places."⁴² As to whether, in this connection, the exorcist is justified in joining natural aids to his spiritual regimen, Menghi answered in the affirmative—conditioned

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴² Girolamo Menghi, *Flagellum daemonum*. . . (Lyons: Sumptibus Petri Landry, 1604), cap. 3, p. 8. Cf. Menghi's *Fuga daemonum*. . . (Venice: Apud Haeredes Johannis Variscici, 1596). According to Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 556, the first ed. of the *Flagellum* appeared at Bologna in 1577–78. On Menghi see also Massimo Petrocchi, *Esorcismi e Magia nell'Italia del Cinquecento e del Seicento* (Naples: Libreria Scientifica, 1957), pp. 15–27.

on the proviso, of course, that such natural antidotes are intended to be palliative rather than truly curative.

Inasmuch as “the Devil is able more intensely to vex a man disposed to him with the melancholy passion than a man who is contrarily disposed,” Menghi judged that any sensual means having the ability to assuage the aggravations of melancholy, among them certain herbs for the taste and musical harmonies for the hearing, is also able to ameliorate the effects of diabolical vexation. Indeed, Menghi conceded in this regard, “the Devil sometimes vexes a man so feebly with an affliction of sorrow that, with the application of some herbs or harmonies equipped to increase those spirits whose motions are contrary to sorrow, such sorrow may be thoroughly eradicated.”⁴³ With this understanding in mind Menghi granted that “priests and exorcists are permitted to apply some sensible remedies in their effort to alleviate the vexation of those who are possessed and assaulted by impure spirits”—provided, of course, that such materially alleviating agents “are blessed in the name of the most holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴ In so doing, however, he warned, the exorcist should take care not to confound the natural effects of demonic affliction with its supernatural causes.

From the higher theological ground of the late Renaissance demonologists, then, the exorcistical and medical functions were conceived as working cooperatively, with the exorcist trained to complete the process of de-demonization of the soul begun by the physician. So far the basic lines of their reasoning were the same as those laid down in earlier centuries, minimally impacted by the philosophical debate going on around them prompted by Pomponazzi’s attack on the Platonic genial theory. Being more theologically than philosophically oriented in their thinking, they remained relatively aloof from the kinds of philosophical issues in contention during this time pertaining to the relation between demons and melancholy. The same cannot be said, however, for a second group of post-1500 demonologists, who, in their deliberations on this subject, were less reticent about what they saw as a philosophical threat to the integrity and sanctity of their discipline.

The effect of the philosophical revolution spearheaded by Pomponazzi, the spokesmen of this second phase of cinquecento demonology complained, was to reverse the relation of demons to melancholy

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

established by divine fiat, with the cooptation of melancholy by the demons now impiously transformed into the cooptation of the demons by melancholy. Should this philosophical assault on Christian orthodoxy succeed, they admonished, not only the existence and efficacy of demons would be put into doubt, but also, in underlying cognation with the demonic realm, the existence and efficacy of the immortal soul. It was from a more defensive posture forced by Pomponazzi, for example, that Francesco Maria Guazzo (fl. 1600), the author of a *Compendium maleficarum* composed at the request of the bishop of Milan, railed at those who “deny that any disease can be borne to mortals by demons, . . . not because they believe that the demons do not wish to perform those things which they do not deny are evil, but because all diseases can be generated only from natural causes.”⁴⁵ With the diabolically vexed Job a pre-eminent scriptural case in point, and Saul another, Guazzo vehemently contested the proposition that demonic affliction can be reduced to a mere humoral imbalance.

Of those propagating the naturalist fallacy attacked by Guazzo, as we have earlier indicated, the name of Avicenna was often to be found in close proximity to those of Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle. Guazzo’s response to this alleged fallacy was no exception to this rule, listing Avicenna with Galen and Hippocrates as inadvertent contributors to the way of thinking coming to a head in Pomponazzi.⁴⁶ As illustrated by another credulous cinquecento writer, however, the Vicenzan noble Strozzi Cigogna (= Cicogna, fl. 1600), whose Italian-language *Del palagio degl’incanti* can be said to have followed the precedent set by Gianfrancesco Pico’s earlier *La Strega* in helping to disseminate the demonological view beyond the parameters of the Latin-based academies and universities, Avicenna could be called upon to back a demonological as readily as a humoral explanation of mental alienation.

⁴⁵ Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum in tres libris distinctum* (Milan: Apud Haeredes August. Traditi, 1608), lib. II, cap. 8, pp. 127–28. On Guazzo see also Robbins, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 236–37, and Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, ch. 2, pp. 91–92 and passim. According to Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 116–17, Guazzo “neglected the gender issue, either totally or by according it only perfunctory treatment.” The feminized title of Guazzo’s tract, however, like that of the notorious *Malleus maleficarum* before it, puts him squarely in the ranks of those who helped foster the witch hunts in which melancholy women proved to bear a major brunt of victimization.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Thus, while agreeing with Avicenna that a physician's expertise is limited to treating the accidental natural effects of disease as opposed to the higher supernatural causes treated by the theologians, Cigogna interpreted that appeal to medical humility to signify, not the greater trustworthiness of the physician's diagnosis, but rather its deficiencies. Defining illness as "nothing other than a discordance of the spirits which, upon their entering the body, suddenly cause the health of the body to deteriorate,"⁴⁷ Cigogna accused the critics of demonology of confounding causes with effects. The lesson furnished by Avicenna to Cigogna, that is to say, was a very different one from that of his anti-demonological opponents, who often cited the identical authority in support of a position of clinical skepticism. In Cigogna's eyes Avicenna did not so much lower demonic influence to the level of natural melancholy as he raised melancholy to the level of a supernaturally induced infirmity. Avicenna's true opinion, Cigogna further declared, was in complete agreement with certain ancient physicians who "have believed that the movement of melancholy often proceeds from the evil spirit, which can have such power to alter the complexion as readily as nature itself when the humor is in abundance and causes infirmity."⁴⁸

Nevertheless, like his contemporary Visconti, Cigogna did not wish to press credulity too far by maintaining the possibility of a transformation through magic of one species into another; it was enough for him that demoniacs professed a *belief* in a transformation. "Therefore the transmutations which are assigned to magicians, witches, and other creatures," he allowed in this regard, "are not accomplished in real and essential fact but, by a diabolical delusion (*con praestigio diabolico*), only appear to be so." Indeed, he emphasized, it is precisely by virtue of this delusory method of working on human minds that demons find in the melancholy humor an advantageous material aid. "One observes melancholic infirmities," Cigogna pointed out, "by which, as the physicians maintain, men often become so afflicted that they believe that they see what they do not see, to hear what they do not hear, to be what they are not, and to have fear

⁴⁷ Strozzi Cigogna (= Cicogna), *Del palagio degl'incanti, & delle gran meraviglie de gli spiriti, & di tutta la natura loro. . . .*, Vicenza: Ad istanza di Roberto Meglietti, 1605, lib. II, cap. 3, p. 103. On Cigogna see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 550–1, who also calls attention to trans. of tract into Latin and its pub. at Cologne in 1606.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. IV, cap. 5, p. 367.

of those things which ought not occasion terror in them," symptoms all induced, he granted, "through the alteration which that offending humor of black bile and melancholy causes in the composure of a man." But while allowing that melancholy can be of use to demons in producing such imaginary phantasms as "wolves, dogs, cats, monkeys, owls, crows and other like animals," Cigogna also made clear that the demons themselves are not to be included among the imagined phantasms of melancholy.⁴⁹ The true cause of such delusions, Cigogna insisted, is an army of demonic spirits whose "King, therefore, and superior to all the others, is Lucifer."⁵⁰

The delusory powers of melancholy so useful to demons, the demonologists were also often wont to point out, could also be extended to the deceptive demonic practice of aping divine miracles. Among the miracles especially notable for being aped by demons, as illustrated by the Neapolitan Benedictine Leonardo Vairo (d. 1603), is the miraculous power to prophesy the future. For it was Vairo's aim, under the heading *De fascino* (1583), to reconcile extraordinary powers of prophetic insight in melancholics with their corresponding vulnerability to demonic corruption.

With Aristotle his authority, Vairo allowed "that melancholics, by whom the forms of things are more lucidly perceived than by others, possess a clearer faculty for divining."⁵¹ Nevertheless, for Vairo, a concession to the vaticinatory powers of melancholy no more implied the elevation of their possessor to a divine place than did comparable powers in animals like the cock and the crow, who are notable for forecasting such events as bad weather. As explained by Vairo, "there are two kinds of divination, one natural and the other supernatural;" whereas the former, being dependent on the volatile imagination, can be said to be enhanced through the natural melancholy humor, the latter, "that which we call prophecy in sacred letters," being utterly free of imaginary phantasms, is not aided, but rather obstructed, by the fumes of the black bile.⁵² To the extent that anything supernatural might enter into and commingle with the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. III, cap. 50, p. 190.

⁵¹ Leonardo Vairo, *De fascino libri tres . . .*, Paris: Apud Nicolaum Chesneau, 1583, lib. II, cap. 4, p. 76. For French trans. see *Trois livres des charmes, sorcelages, ou enchantements . . .*, trans. J. Baudon (Paris: N. Chesneau, 1583), p. 153. On this tract see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 528–29. Vairo ended his career as bishop of Pozzuoli.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 78 (*Trois livres*, pp. 155, 158).

melancholy humor, Vairo determined that it can only be of the wicked demonic kind, since the body of a man subject to melancholy disturbances, “being bitter, sorrowful, and turbulent, is properly judged to be a congenial place within nature for the demons.”⁵³

The foregoing contributors to the Renaissance demonological traditions illustrate that demonology and corporeal medicine often worked collaboratively rather than in opposition to one another, with the medical writers furnishing the demonologists with supportive references relating to the natural effects of demon-caused alienation. Nor was this collaboration always a one way road. Not a few medical writers happily concurred with the theologians, with the purported “Devil’s bath” a case in point, that the physiological and demonological explanations of witchcraft are complementary rather than contradictory to one another. Sometimes, as illustrated by Battista Codronchi (1547–1628) in his *De morbis veneficis ac veneficiis* (1595), a physician’s medical theories could become so interpenetrated by demonological ones as to make them virtually inseparable.

Taking to task an earlier Paduan physician who had cast doubt on the demonological assessment of melancholy, Pietro d’Abano, Codronchi charged that the so-called Conciliator “testifies against Christian truth in saying that he had seen many persons who, although they had been possessed by demons and exhibited human powers in great abundance, nevertheless, upon being purged of their black bile, were completely cured and restored to their natural sanity.”⁵⁴ Following the errant path laid out by D’Abano, Codronchi continued, was a later Pietro of the Paduan school, Pomponazzi, “who sought vainly and impiously to reduce to natural causes the operations of demons and witches, and indeed even of prophets and of Christ the Saviour.”⁵⁵ Or, for an example closer to his own day, Codronchi cited the case of a contemporary physician, Girolamo Cardano, whom he deemed to have assisted Pomponazzi in his impious errors by inferring from the vexations of witches “that diseases

⁵³ *Ibid.*, lib. III, cap. 8, p. 240.

⁵⁴ Giovanni Battista Codronchi, *De morbis veneficis ac veneficiis libri quatuor* (Venice: Apud Franciscum de Franciscis Senensem, 1595), lib. II, cap. 8, fol. 84^v (misnumbered pagination, showing fol. 94^v). On Codronchi, from Imola, see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 544–47, and on the resemblance of Codronchi’s themes to those of Vairo, cited above, pp. 528–29. Pitting Codronchi’s theologically grounded medical ethics against those of more thoroughgoing nature-based ones relatively free of theological entanglements is Schleiner, *Medical Ethics*, esp. pp. 99 ff.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, fols. 84^v–85^r (misnumbered pag., fols. 94^v–89^r).

are nothing but the result of a certain occult nature" (*morbos esse sed occultioris cuiusdam naturae*).⁵⁶ But this is not to say that Codronchi saw only fellow Italians like Pomponazzi and Cardano as purveyors of the kind of blasphemous skepticism for which D'Abano was an early voice. Comparably sacrilegious skeptical currents, he maintained, had crept into Italy from the north, with Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) a prominent case in point. Pomponazzi, then, as viewed by Codronchi, was only one more instance of a general trend of atheistic impiety sapping the foundations of Christian orthodoxy by implying that mere physiological imbalance lies behind what in truth are demonic agitations of the soul.⁵⁷

* * *

Closely bound up with Catholic demonology, as we earlier indicated, is the exaltation of the solitary life of contemplation deemed by a monastic-based Catholic tradition to be best equipped to defend against demonic insinuation. As the values of Renaissance Italy came to coalesce with those of the Catholic reform movement the Catholic theologians, by continuing to hold to solitary contemplative practices in accordance with medieval precedents, were intent on saving their beloved solitary way of life in the face of the accusation that demons are more likely to visit a man alone than in company. A foremost line of defense adopted by this school of thought, we have seen, was systematically to purge melancholy from the solitary meditative process, considered by its members to be a highly propitious natural intermediary for the attraction of demons into solitude. While differing from the humanists about the value of solitude, the theorists of this view did not generally differ from the humanists about what they saw to be the noxious effect of melancholy on solitude. For these a rigorously tempered program of spiritual exercises constituted a more effective remedy for melancholy than vain and often intemperately performed secular activities.

To be sure, not all mystical theorists responding to the reinvigorated religious demands of the Catholic reform movement were unreceptive to the melancholy vogue inaugurated by Ficino. As earlier observed, the Milanese Dominican Battista da Crema stands out as

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 85^r (misnumbered pag., fol. 89^r). On Cardano's demonological skepticism see below, pp. 336 ff.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Concerning the demysticizing tendencies of Erasmus' theology prompting this indictment by Codronchi see Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 93–96.

a prominent early cinquecento example of a mystical theorist opting to appropriate Ficino's Platonized doctrine of melancholy genius and put it to the use of a revived mystical movement. Other mystical theorists participating in this revival, however, if not exhibiting outright hostility to the melancholy vogue, appeared to be essentially untouched by it.

Thus, in advice of a tenor radically different from that of his older Dominican colleague Da Crema, Daniello Aretino (16th cent.) counseled in a handbook for preachers that "if you are wounded by anguish and melancholy, repose yourself in divinely spiritual consolation."⁵⁸ Along the same lines Antonio Pellegrini (1530–1616), while admitting to the special attraction of melancholics to solitude, argued for a change of the usual black habit of monks to a white one which, so he maintained, would assist in chasing away the blues commonly interfering with their meditations. Taking particular aim at the Benedictines, notable for "their dark, and thus melancholic, habit" (*l'habito loro cosi oscuro, & cosi maninconico*), Pellegrini prescribed a combination of brightly colored clothing, appetizing foods, and a highly disciplined will as salutary antidotes for the melancholy commonly visiting the contemplative in his solitude. To the contrary of finding solace in melancholy, Pellegrini counseled, "contemplative men ought always to have cheerful and happy minds."⁵⁹

In keeping with the guidelines of spiritual exercises, it is true, some later Renaissance mystical theorists, with the northern theorist Gerson pointing the way, conceded to the presence of melancholy at the inferior stages of the contemplative process even as they sought to expel it at the superior stages. For such solitary contemplatives it was no more of an embarrassment to admit the nuisance of melancholy in their occupation than it was to admit the nuisance of the vice of sorrow with which it shared underlying symptoms. A typical example of this collusion between vices and humors is found in a handbook of meditation by the Jesuit Bartolomeo Riccio (1490–1569), who one moment admonishes against "tepidity and sloth (*acediam*) in our spiritual studies or exercises," and the next moment, against "a tepid, melancholic, slothful and diffident soul despairing of the divine

⁵⁸ Daniello Aretino, *La vita dell'huomo christiano* (Naples: Per M. Joan Paulo Sugganappo, 1547), fol. 29^v.

⁵⁹ Antonio Pellegrini, *Della vita solitaria et de lo sprezzamento de la morte* (Venice: Giovanni Griffio, 1568), lib. I, fols. 5^v, 26^r.

compassion and mercy."⁶⁰ More specifically explicating the part of the black bile in helping to induce despair, Riccio defined melancholy as "a certain disquietude of the mind (*una certa inquietudine dell'animo*), caused by something displeasing, which has befallen you against your will and which keeps you oppressed in a deep sorrow."⁶¹ Whether expressed as corporeal affliction or as a vice, the vexatious state identified as melancholy by the physicians was characteristically viewed by theorists of meditation like Riccio as needing purging through a regulated method of spiritual elevation.

Working under a like assumption was a Jesuit theorist of a later generation, Claudio Aquaviva (1543–1615), who, considering the theologian as a kind of spiritual physician, assigned him the task of detecting and expurgating natural along with supernatural obstacles to meditation. "Before you undertake the summoning of a cure for an infirm person," Aquaviva counseled, "reflect attentively upon, and weigh very diligently, the quality of the disease and complexion of the body, or, as termed by St. Gregory, its mixture (*conspersionem*), ascertaining, that is to say, whether one is sanguine and joyful, or melancholy and sad, or choleric and quick to anger, or phlegmatic and remiss."⁶² And for Aquaviva, taking Gerson's lead in this matter like Pietro da Lucca before him, it was above all the ingredient of melancholy in the "mixture" comprising a man's complexion that stood at the head of his list of natural impediments to a successful meditation—this by reason of melancholy's special attraction not only to solitude, but also to the excessive scrupulosity often present in those partaking of the solitary life.⁶³ A divinely sanctioned function of spiritual exercises, according to this outlook, is systematically to purge the condition of solitude required for spiritual advancement of its familiar demon-attracting melancholy.

That the commonplace clerical subordination of civic to solitary values also reached into the laity during this period is also demonstrable from its literature. Should we believe one such lay champion

⁶⁰ Bartolomeo Riccio da Lugo, *Istruzione di meditare* (Brescia: Appresso Pietromaria Marchetti, 1601), parte II, tratt. 3, cap. 6, p. 461.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, parte I, tratt. 1, cap. 3, p. 61.

⁶² Claudio Aquaviva, *Industriae pro superioribus eiusdem Societatis, ad curandos animae morbos* (Rome: In Collegio Rom. eiusdem Societat., 1606), cap. 1, p. 11. Born in Naples, Aquaviva was the fifth general of the Society of Jesus.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, esp. cap. 18. On Da Lucca's earlier role in mediating Gerson's mystical theory see above, p. 42.

of the contemplative ideal, the Venetian patrician Stefano Tiepolo (= Stephanus Theupolus, fl. 1590), the basic choice to be made was not between a demon-plagued world and a demon-free refuge of solitude, but rather between two different demonic realms—though now interpreted in the morally neutral sense of the ancients preceding the Christian identification of demons with the Devil. One of these demonic realms, Tiepolo proposed, rules over civic activity, and the other, over solitary contemplation. “The demons of Saturn,” as Tiepolo had it, “are bestowed for leading saturnine souls to the contemplative life, demons of Jupiter for leading jovials to the civic life, and so on concerning all the other planets.”⁶⁴ While, as viewed by Tiepolo, the two life styles of civic activity and solitary contemplation are theoretically separable, they are far from equal. Just as solitude-loving Saturn occupies a level celestially superior to that of civic-loving Jupiter, Tiepolo reasoned, so does the solitary life of the contemplative under Saturn’s aegis occupy a superior standing in the moral hierarchy of human beings to that of active civic life under the aegis of Jupiter. Significantly, however, Tiepolo made no attempt to associate the saturnine demons with melancholy. To the extent that he can be said to have favorably resonated with a principal theme of the Florentine Platonic revival, the subordination of jovial civic activity to Saturnine lucubrations in solitude, it was more with Pico’s notion of a melancholy-free Saturn—resembling Dante’s before him—than with Ficino’s notion of a melancholy-inducing Saturn that Tiepolo bears affiliation.

The lay appeal of the solitary ideal, as illustrated in a laudatory discourse on solitude by the early seicento Paduan count Flavio Querengo (d. 1647), extended well into the seicento. “The primal innocence and quiet of the mind are best preserved in solitude,” Querengo proclaimed, “for which reason Aristotle correctly stated that a solitary man can be called a kind of god.”⁶⁵ That the Aristotelian moral maxim sustaining this statement was far more commonly invoked by the civic opponents of solitude than by its apologists, pointing up as it did the greater likelihood of bestial than divine-like traits arising out of the solitary condition, was conveniently ignored by Querengo. By lifting this maxim out of its usual civic context

⁶⁴ Stefano Tiepolo, *Academicarum contemplationum libri decem*. . . . (Venice: Apud Petrum Dehuchinum, 1576), lib. 6, cap. 6, p. 111.

⁶⁵ Flavio Querengo, *Della solitudine*, in *Discorsi morali politici et naturali* (Padua: Appresso Giulio Crivellari, 1644), p. 172. Querengo was the count of Poiago.

Querengo interpreted Aristotle as upholding the superiority of the solitary over the communal life. For Querengo as for Tiepolo a half century earlier, moreover, it is significant that an invocation of the solitary ideal did not necessarily entail a corresponding invocation of the "Aristotelian" doctrine of melancholy genius still in widespread vogue in his day. For these lay advocates of the solitary life as for their clerical counterparts, melancholy constituted, not a natural facilitator of the contemplative process as Ficino and his disciples had it, but rather an obstructive—and demon-inviting—disturbance to contemplation.

* * *

Given the pressures of the Catholic reform movement on Renaissance secular culture during the later cinquecento, harboring as it did an inborn bias on behalf of the *vita solitaria et contemplativa*, we could easily assume that the civic ideal that was such a prominent feature of the quattrocento literary landscape had reached the point of its death thralls. Taking cognizance of the highly volatile nature of the Italian cinquecento in comparison with the relatively tranquil century preceding it—occasioned among its more patently disruptive events, in inflammatory combination with religious schism, by foreign invasion and an intensification of the witch hysteria, we might expect the ideals of social and political cohesion advocated by the civic humanists to be in a state of waning rather than waxing. Yet, as it will now be our aim to illustrate, this was far from the case. Instead of languishing following its high point during the heyday of the Florentine and Venetian republics, civic humanism continued to act as a serious counteractant to the solitary ideal at an historical moment when its anchoring in the real world was becoming all the more insecure.⁶⁶

Cinquecento humanism inherited not only one, but two basic axioms from its quattrocento antecedent. The first axiom, conditioned

⁶⁶ As pointed out by Grendler, *Critics*, p. 137, "most sixteenth-century champions of education for the *vita civile* laid less emphasis on dedication to a city . . . than their Quattrocento predecessors. The purpose of learning often became service to a prince at court rather than to one's native city. . . . Nevertheless, the basic program of studies whose purpose was to prepare the young man for society remained, as did the aversion to a solitary life." As for Florence in particular, cf. Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), I, 153: ". . . the main efflorescence of Republican political theory occurred in the generation after the return of the Medici in 1512." Significantly, a supreme artistic symbol of Florence's retention of its republican past, Michelangelo's statue of *David*, owes to this period.

by an Aristotelian outlook and reinforced by Horatian and Vitruvian revivals in the literary and visual arts, put forth as a guiding moral and aesthetic precept of the healthy human mind the golden mean. The second axiom in turn, finding its most famous philosophical expression in Aristotle's *Politics* and eloquently restated by Cicero following his Roman republican model, declared the human being to be an inherently communal animal. While finding its high point in the quattrocento, civic humanism with its built-in bias against solitude, continued to make its strong presence known during the cinquecento and early seicento.

At this second stage of civic humanism, too, the problem of solitude was inextricably bound up by many of its advocates with the problem of melancholy, held by the typical Ciceronian humanist no less than by the typical Galenist medical theorist to be inimicable to both a sound body and a sound mind. In this later phase of Renaissance thought as in its earlier phase, the penchant of the medical writers to interpret melancholy in their patients as a sign of pathological alienation found a striking parallel in the penchant of contemporary humanist scholars to interpret melancholy as a sign of what occurs when healthy civic activity and a stringently disciplined imagination is traded for unhealthy solitude and an imagination exceeding rational limits.

Much as the physicians could call on Cicero and Horace to strengthen their admonitions against the violation of the golden mean and melancholy solitude in which that violation was most likely to be effected, the humanists could just as readily call on Hippocrates, Galen, and their medical successors to strengthen their admonitions in the same two respects. As will now be made clear, this climate of opinion did not simply evaporate with the advent of the Platonic revival; on the contrary, it continued to exert the same appeal as in its pre-Ficinian days. Like their quattrocento forerunners, the cinquecento humanists placed melancholy, which they attributed to a combination of excessive phantasizing and excessive solitary seclusion encouraging such phantasizing, on much the same defensive posture as did their medical counterparts. This does not mean, however, that post-1500 civic humanism constituted a mere mirror image of its pre-1500 predecessor, having now been put on a markedly more defensive posture provoked by a combination of two major factors. The first factor was the effective collapse, in fact if not in theory, of the republican form of government in Florence that had acted as a principal mainstay of the quattrocento theory, and the second fac-

tor, the entrance on the scene of the Florentine revival of Plato in intellectual response to that collapse.

Later Renaissance testaments to the continued appeal of the civic outlook are found in a flurry of political writings appearing especially after the mid-point of the cinquecento pointing up the benefits arising out of civic activity and, conversely, the detriments incurred through a disengagement from society. Many of these, as we might expect from our familiarity with their quattrocento precursors, honed in on the affliction of melancholy as an especially conspicuous price to be paid for the evasion of civic responsibility. What separates the tone of these tracts from that of their quattrocento predecessors is the full impact on their thinking of the Florentine Platonic revival, which had the effect of encouraging many of the features, including the feature of melancholy genius, which they sought to discourage. While late Renaissance civic humanists at times betrayed the seeping of Ficino's Platonized Aristotle into their writings, their principal philosophical inspiration, as will now be our turn to examine at closer hand, was rather the ethical and political Aristotle who counseled moderation and communal engagement in obedience to imperatives instilled in them by nature.

C. *The Humanist Obstacles*

As in its earlier quattrocento expressions—but now with the stakes considerably raised by reason of a consensus of the northern Protestant movement reaching the same conclusion, cinquecento civic humanism found a convenient whipping boy in the monastic profession notable for exulting the virtues of solitude. Throwing into relief the monastic underpinning of the attitude to which the humanists were reacting was the jurist Andrea Alciato (1492–1550), who, under the heading of the sloth (*desidia*) in his book of emblems, ridiculed “certain cenobites who display an appearance of theoretical speculation, yet spend their lives in the inactivity of lethargy.”⁶⁷ These sorry souls, charged Alciato, are so blunted by the heaviness of their senses that, instead of arriving at the angelic heights as they claim, they sink deeper into a kind of insensate quiescence closer in nature to

⁶⁷ Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata cum commentariis* (Padua: Apud Petrum Paulum Tozzium, 1621), embl. 81, p. 358.

downtrodden stones than to vigorously inspired and uplifted angels. "Concealing their feverish faces behind their cloaks," Alciato railed against these pretenders of virtue, "they apply their minds neither to honest studies nor to the arts, and do not exercise the ideas of their minds with either industry or diligence."⁶⁸

A key to the appeal of the civic ideal in its earlier quattrocento mode of expression, we have seen, lay in the belief of humanists like Alberti that it helped to stabilize the mind in a world of unpredictable contingencies, the underlying assumption being that the communal interlocking of one's personal standing in the world with the standings of others enhances its power to withstand the lashings of the goddess Fortuna. This is a rationale that, even as events appeared to overwhelm the kind of optimism sustaining the quattrocento civic ideal, still continued to condition cinquecento civic thinking; as a participant in a dialogue of the rhetorician Giambattista Cinzio Giraldi (1504–1573) reasserted this inherited humanist principle: "I say that the end to which man ought to direct all his actions is civic felicity, which is the intrinsic reward of moral virtue; here fortune does not have a power base (*punto di forza*)."⁶⁹ That Giraldi's civic *punto di forza*, following Aristotle, belonged to the very definition of the human being was further articulated by Marco Vida, who, even as he paid tribute to the Platonic inspiration theory, concomitantly endorsed the Aristotelian-based maxim that "nature, which always flees evil, detests the solitary."⁷⁰ Still more pointedly espousing an Aristotelian slant on this subject was Felice Figliucci (1524–1590), who declared that the human being, "by nature a civil, political, social, and friendly animal," is reduced in solitude to the nature of a rapacious beast.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁶⁹ Giambattista Cinzio Giraldi, *Hecatommithi ovvero cento novelle* (Venice: Appresso Domenico Imberti, 1593), parte II, "Della vita civile," fol. 9^v. But indicating a more pessimistic attitude in this same regard is Grendler, *Critics*, p. 16: "The disintegration of the Italian scene forced men to reassess the possibility of effectively controlling their own destinies. The *virtù* with which men had opposed *Fortuna* in the Quattrocento seemed inadequate to face the reality of the Cinquecento, and the *studia humanitatis* which had prepared men for the *vita civile* irrelevant to the bitter experiences of the Cinquecento."

⁷⁰ Marco Girolamo Vida, *Dialogi de rei publicae dignitate* (Cremona: Apud Vincentium Contem., 1556), lib. II, fol. 64^v. On Vida's advocacy of the Platonic frenzy theory see above, p. 133.

⁷¹ Felice Figliucci, *De la politica ovvero scienza civile secondo la dottrina d'Aristotile libri otto* (Venice: Presso Gio. Battista Somascho, 1583), cap. 2, fol. 8^r. On Figliucci's

These and many other writers of the Italian cinquecento bear witness that civic humanism, far from coming to an end in the post-Ficino Renaissance, continued to have broad appeal. Indeed, according to the Sieneese humanist Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1578), Plato as fully as Aristotle can be called on to attest to the sanctity of the communal ideal. “Concerning the subject of civil felicity,” argued Piccolomini, “I do not judge there to be a great difference between the Platonists and the Peripatetics,” with each in his own way upholding the proposition that “a man is not born for himself alone, but for helping others.”⁷² As for the undesirable consequences of solitude, Piccolomini’s Sieneese predecessor Patrizi, as we have seen, preferred the medically charged word *melancholia* over Petrarca’s theologically charged word *accidia* in referring to the sense of psychic alienation provoked by separation from the community. In a cinquecento translation of Patrizi’s Latin text into the vulgar tongue, however, Giovanni Fabrini (16th cent.) appeared to dissolve the distinction between vice and humorally induced alienation altogether by employing the terms *malinconia* and *accidia* as though they were interchangeable.⁷³ In this way Patrizi’s translator both underscored Petrarca’s secularization of a concept originally formulated in the cloister as one of the capital vices and encouraged its identification with the state diagnosed by the physicians as melancholy.

Another writer of the period to treat melancholy and *accidia* as essentially identical forms of psychic alienation, the self-taught Florentine Giambattista Gelli (1498–1563), easily moved from one term to the other in pointing up, in a dialogue on the virtues of civic life, the likely consequences of forsaking society for solitary seclusion. Thus, one moment Gelli had his civic advocate enjoin his adversary to “flee excessive vigilance and solitude, because the one may debilitate you and the other may often engender within you tedium and

uneasy positioning between the Platonic and Aristotelian outlooks see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 129, 172.

⁷² Alessandro Piccolomini, *Della institutione morale libri XII*. . . (Venice: Francesco Ziletti, 1583), lib. II, cap. 8, pp. 75–6. On this work, first pub. in 1542 as *De la institutione di tutta la vita de l’uomo nato nobile e in città libera*. . . and revised with new title in 1560, see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 172 ff., and Grendler, *Critics*, pp. 138–39. A Paduan Aristotelian from the same Sieneese family which had produced the former Pope Pius II, Piccolomini was himself raised to the archbishopric of Siena.

⁷³ See the *Discorsi de’l reverendo Patrio Sanese vescovo di Gaieta*. . . , trans. Giovanni Fabrini Fiorentino da Fighine (Venice: Per comin de Trino di Monferrato, 1547), with an example at p. 110. For Patrizi’s Latin-based choice of terminology see above, pp. 66 ff.

accidia,” and another moment clothed the identical advice in the language of the physicians with the admonition that he “drive away melancholy and those thoughts which draw the spirits to your head, thereby removing them from those parts [of the body] where they aid in the digestion and carry out other functions pertaining to your preservation.”⁷⁴ Gelli’s own busy participation in town life, a shoemaker by training, had persuaded him that, no matter by what name this intense distress of the soul is known, its remedy lies, not in solitary meditation, but in vigorous civic engagement. Conveniently, however, he stopped short of addressing the problem of how he himself had managed to find the solitary leisure to formulate and to compose his thoughts on this subject while escaping the state of *accidia*-melancholy against which he warned.

Of the late Renaissance writings addressed to the civic-solitude debate, one of the most influential on a European-wide scale, even warranting a contemporary English translation, was *La civil conversazione* of Stefano Guazzo di Trino (1530–1593). What makes this tract especially useful for our purpose is that, whereas in the previous instances melancholy enters the scene as but one of a number of pernicious effects produced by solitude, in this one melancholy takes center stage as its main symptom. Indeed, it is the discernment of melancholy in one of the dialogue’s participants, identified in the preface as Stefano’s brother Guglielmo, that prompts the other participant, the physician Annibale Magnocavalli, to lodge a full-scale attack on the solitary way of life which he judges to be the principal cause of his disabling vexations.

Guglielmo, in Guazzo’s dialogue, had just spent several years abroad in France where, by his own admission, he had contracted an affliction escaping the skills of virtually all its physicians. “I feel oppressed by such a ponderous melancholy,” Guglielmo complains to Annibale, “that I fear with good reason that my illness is perhaps incurable.” On being advised by Annibale that, in response, “you turn your mind to those things that give you pleasure and flee those things giving you aggravation,” Guglielmo has a ready answer. He has found in the course of his life, he relates, “that the com-

⁷⁴ Giambattista Gelli, *I capricci del Bottaio: Giusto e l’Anima* (pub. from 1548 ed.), in *Opere*, ed. Agenore Gelli (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1855), p. 242. But concerning Gelli’s concurrent role as a constructive critic of the civic system he was upholding see Grendler, *Critics*, pp. 100–101.

pany of many men gives me anxiety and annoyance, whereas the opposite of solitude acts as a solace and alleviation of my tribulations."⁷⁵ Annibale, who has been made conversant with symptoms like those of Guglielmo in his medical practice, counters that his friend has misconstrued the source of his suffering by confounding its cause for its remedy. "Do you honestly believe," Annibale queries Guglielmo, "that if you had lingered for a long period in your solitary way of life, you would have become healthy?" On the contrary, the very regimen of solitary seclusion he imagines to be his balm is in truth an occasion of his further debilitation. He is not to lose hope, however, inasmuch as "the medicine is now in your hands with which you may shortly be restored to well-being."⁷⁶ To Guglielmo's reply that he cannot rid himself of his illness if he does not first understand it, Annibale furnishes him with an extensive diagnosis.

The true cause of his melancholy state of mind, Annibale answers Guglielmo, "is your false imagination whereby, like the moth circling the flame of the candle, you pleasurably seek your own death, and instead of consuming your illness, you nourish it." In addition, Annibale continues his prognosis, Guglielmo is exacerbating his disease by seeking out the very condition of solitary seclusion which feeds it. "For, by imagining that you can receive relief by means of the solitary life," Annibale cautions Guglielmo, "you burden yourself with the weight of evil humors which, as enemies of cheerfulness and sociability, become concentrated in your innermost being, from where they induce you to hide yourself in solitary places conformable to their nature." Just as flames burn all the more ardently when they are enclosed in a small space, Guglielmo is instructed, so do these humors burn all the more ardently in their enclosed place. Guglielmo is well advised, accordingly, "to reject this sinister belief of your's which led you until now to seek a cure in what is its opposite, and to reverse your course by holding solitude to be a poison to you, and human company, the foundation of life, to be its antidote."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Stefano Guazzo, *La civil conversazione . . . divisa in quattro libri* (Venice: Presso Altobello Salicato, 1575), lib. I, pp. 5-6. Trans. into English by G. Pettie as *The Civile Conversation* (London: Thomas East, 1586). On this work see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 158 ff. Guazzo was a private secretary to the duchess Margherita of Mantua.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Guazzo's *La civil conversazione*, it would appear, validates one prominent Aristotelian doctrine, to wit, that defining the human being as a political animal, while invalidating another doctrine, widely believed to have received the personal blessing of Aristotle, allowing for a genial exception to civic norms which sanctions melancholy in a moderately adust form. The effect here is to confront two Aristotles with one another, the first calling for normative rules of civic behavior and the other permitting a select few, on the model of the ancient heroes, to break those rules. It was also possible for the contributors to this genre of literature, however, not so much to oppose the two Aristotles as to integrate them into their humanist overviews. An example of this more conciliatory approach to melancholy in a larger homage to the civic life is revealed in a dialogue by the Paduan philologist Sperone Speroni (1500–1588).

According to Speroni's spokesman in this dialogue, the citizens of a town are divided into three main classes: artisans, who, by reason of relying mainly on their hands rather than on their brains, are the least respected; philosophers, admired but not liked "because their melancholy seems to make them unsuitable for the friendship of men;" and, assuming a place between the extremes of the busy manual and leisurely philosophical professions, active *virtuosi* whose responsibility it is to effect "peace treaties, wars, punishments, rewards, reproaches, praises, and other things of this nature." While announcing, through his spokesman, a preference for the intelligently active life of the *virtuosi* "as a means between the extremes," Speroni revealed his basic agreement with Plato that all three ranks are needed to achieve a well-rounded community of citizens, "the manual with regard to the body, the speculative with regard to the mind, and the active man with regard to both."⁷⁸ Implicit in Speroni's admission of speculative philosophers into the civic mix is the admission of a measure of melancholy marking the philosopher's solitary ways.

Of a comparably conciliatory frame of mind was the Jesuit-trained theorist of "reason of state," Giovanni Botero (1544–1617). But whereas Speroni seemed to accept melancholy as a necessary part of the scholarly life, Botero, in his *Della ragione di stato*, sought to retain a place for letters maximally unencumbered by melancholy.

⁷⁸ Sperone Speroni, *Della vita attiva e contemplativa*, in *Dialogi*, 5 vols. (Venice: Domenico Occhi, 1740), II, 26. On Speroni, at the center of the Paduan Accademia degli Infiammati, see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 159ff. and Grendler, *Critics*, p. 140.

Pointing out the close relationship that traditionally had existed between the solitary requirements of scholarship and melancholy, Botero was also cognizant of how the solitude-melancholy nexus had negatively impacted on a prime function of the guardians of the state, its military defense. For this reason, judged Botero, inasmuch as the guardians of the public safety should also be steeped in theories imparted to them by letters, literary study should be as free as possible of melancholic affliction.

From the occupation with letters, observed Botero, are born "two effects which are very contrary to the military virtue." The first effect consists of the incompatibility of contemplation with action, famously illustrated by Archimedes who became so immersed in speculation that he proved to be ineffective in the defense of Syracuse. The second effect arises from the fact that letters "render a man melancholic, as Aristotle and experience teaches," an outcome which is "very contrary to that vivacity which one seeks in military personnel."⁷⁹ But having said that, Botero granted that some measure of solitude, despite the dire threat of melancholy so often attached to it, is not altogether disadvantageous to the demands of a well-run state.

First of all, acknowledged Botero, not all defenders of the state are to be denied access to letters, but only the lower ranks, "because the principal virtue of the soldier is obedience and promptness in submitting to the commands of his superior officer (*capo*)." Concerning those who are responsible for giving the orders, on the other hand, a very different rule holds. "In a captain (*capitano*)," Botero allowed, "the study of letters is, as it were, necessary, the reason being that they open their eyes and perfect their judgment, and furnish them with many benefits affecting their prudence and sagacity."⁸⁰ Needless to say, the same concession Botero extended to a military captain also necessarily applied to the prince, who in the Italy of that day might or might not be the same person.

Notwithstanding an admission of the need for at least some solitary leisure on the part of military leaders and their princes, however, Botero showed his reluctance to extend the same admission to melancholy, which he thought should be minimized if not eradicated

⁷⁹ Giovanni Botero, *Della ragione di stato libri dieci*, 4th ed. (Milan: Nella stampa del quon. Pacifico Pontio, ad istanza di Pietro Martire, 1596), lib. V, p. 150. Eng. trans.: P.J. and D.P. Waley, *The Reason of State* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-52.

altogether from the scholarly act. Thus, in a separate chapter on the character of human courage, Botero advised that the prince be “of a well-composed character and of a healthy and vigorous complexion, and should assist nature with those arts which preserve and augment his well-being.”⁸¹ That melancholy is basically incompatible with this picture of princely *sanità*, the indispensable condition of a mind vigilantly prepared for action, is made clear by Botero’s further avowal that “the ways of keeping the mind awake and quick are all those which aid the health, which impede melancholy (*che impediscono la maninconia*), and which excite a man with desire, with honor, and with glory.”⁸²

The tense balancing act attempted by Botero—between recognizing the need for scholarly study to furnish theoretical guidelines for civic behavior and discouraging the melancholy often found to be a close attendant of such study—was again attempted by a later political theorist, Fabrizio Campani d’Osino (fl. 1600). On one hand, as might be expected in this literary genre, Campani urgently exhorted against the dangers of excessive solitude, sometimes opting for the traditional ecclesiastical word *accidia* to signify one of its worst perils and other times opting for the medical word *malinconia*. “For it was through active virtue and through the excellence and greatness of works,” Campani reiterated a familiar motif of the civic humanists, “that Hercules was esteemed and revered as a god by the Greeks.”⁸³ Needless to say, however, the appeal to the ancient heroes like this one is a double-edged one, inasmuch as Hercules was listed among the great melancholics by Aristotle. Campani was not oblivious to a potentially bipolar reading of the heroic ideal, and, incorporating it into his larger political vision, accepted the legitimacy of both solitude and its accompanying melancholy when they were subordinated to the demands of civic activity. His argument went as follows.

“Some take pleasure in the world and acquire fame for themselves,” Campani acknowledged, “whereas others, not suitable for activity, mount up to Heaven by inactive virtues (*con le virtù otiose*).”⁸⁴ But, in Campani’s mind, these two classes of men were by no means

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, lib. 2, p. 77.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸³ Fabrizio Campani d’Osino, *De la vita civile overo del senno libri dieci* (Venice: Appresso Francesco Bolzetta, 1607), lib. VI, fol. 116^r.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

equals. If it came to a choice between two alternatives, Romulus, the symbol of active civic engagement, was greatly to be preferred to Pythagoras, the symbol of solitary detachment. Solitary seclusion, Campani insisted, is only of value so far as it helps to produce theories applicable to civic concerns. After all, he reminded his readers, while Jesus was now and then drawn to solitude, he never remained in that state indefinitely, but always referred the lessons of solitude to the public sphere. On a more practical level, so did “the ingenious Archimedes,” who realized that solitude is not an end in itself but only a means for effecting brilliant works adaptable to higher civic ends.⁸⁵

Even in solitude, Campani insisted, the civic dictum ought always be remembered that “there should be continuous labor of body and mind, to which a man is born as a bird to flight.” Vigorous activity is as pressing to one in solitude as it is to one societally engaged, for which reason one healthy in both mind and body “praises exercise (*exercitio*) in order to flee idleness in all its modes, and *accidia* its companion.” In elaboration Campani cautioned that “when we remain idle, slothful (*accidiosus*), and lazy for a long time, the Demon, a very vigilant assassin, enters to administer the soul what the poet (*viz.*, Petrarca) called ‘evil pleasures of the mind’ (*mala mentis gaudia*), that is, the tedious thoughts of *accidia*.”⁸⁶

The oblique reference to the solitude-loving Petrarca by Campani suggests that, in his conception of debilitating *accidia*, he was thinking of an afflictive condition touching on deeper levels of the psyche than those affected by mere phlegmatic-like indolence. Our surmisal is confirmed later in the text when the identical affliction is designated by the medical term melancholy (*malinconia*). In its enervative capacity, to be sure, Campani countered *accidia* with an antidote from the Platonic arsenal, to wit, the divine frenzies, which, in typical Platonic fashion, he saw as inciting the soul out of its despondent depths.⁸⁷ At the same time Campani discerned within the “*accidiosus*” himself an inborn capacity to assist this invigorating awakening of the soul by the divine frenzies. One source for this dual capacity of *accidia*-melancholy lay in the Pauline notion of penitent sorrow, and another, in the Ficinian notion of genial melancholy.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 116^v.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 117^r.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, lib. X, fol. 188^v.

The characteristic melancholy sorrow of the solitary contemplative, Campani agreed with the Platonists taking Ficino's lead, is not intrinsically bad, but is so only when it gets in the way of productive solitary activity. Its value depends entirely on its use. It is only melancholy in its negative form, identical to "the first melancholy" (*la prima malinconia*) visited on Adam and Eve as a result of their disobedience, which is to be rejected out-of-hand as an enemy to "honest occupations and praiseworthy exercises." Following this same guideline, according to Campani, melancholy sorrow assumed a favorable form in David and in St. Peter at the time of his denial of Christ, but an unfavorable form in Cain and in Judas.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, in conceding to a virtuous potential of melancholy, Campani by no means intended to assist the cause of those disparaging the civic ideal. On the contrary, much like Botero before him, he determined, in the context of a scholarly tract that itself required solitary leisure for its formulation and composition, that even the most exalted of theories forged in melancholy separation from the community should be turned back upon the community to help guide it to its providentially assigned goal.

Writings like those of Botero and Campani bear witness that, even as late Renaissance political theorists tended to cast solitude and its attendant melancholy as hindrances to the civic ideal they were advancing, they, much like Alberti before them when caught up in a similar quandary, were compelled to admit at least a modicum of melancholy into their lives as the price of their solitary studies. Greatly intensifying the dilemma of the civic apologists at this second stage of expression, moreover, was the pressure lacking in its pre-Ficinian phase by the vogue of melancholy genius concurrently being disseminated throughout Europe. If one response to this vogue, like these, was to accept a certain compromise between the two theoretically opposing outlooks, another response, like that of Ansaldo Cebá (1565–1623), was to hold firmly against the forces of the melancholy vogue. Thus, ridiculing those who go about their city displaying "a stupid mind and a melancholy countenance," Cebá charged such wretched souls with pretending to reach mental and spiritual heights unattainable by ordinary citizens while in truth becoming mired in ignominious depths of mental illness marked by delusions of grandeur.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 117r.

⁸⁹ Ansaldo Cebá, *Il cittadino di repubblica* (Genoa: Appresso Giuseppe Pavoni, 1617), cap. 47, p. 176.

Whereas civic-minded writers like Guazzo, Botero, and Campani emphasized the connection between melancholy and the violation of the rules of communal engagement, other humanistically inclined writers of the period, likewise following a quattrocento precedent in this regard, emphasized the connection between melancholy and the violation of the rules of moderation. Also like their earlier forerunners, who thereby helped to set the stage for Ficino's doctrine of melancholy genius, the late Renaissance civic humanists, even as they attempted to set rational limits to human endeavor, sometimes felt compelled to acknowledge, on the model of the ancient heroes, an occasional license to break through those limits. Just as civic theorists sometimes realized the need to allow rare "heroic" transgressions of the imperative to live and work in relationship with others, so did they also sometimes realize the need, in keeping with the same heroic paradigm, to allow rare transgressions of the golden mean customarily held to lend moral and aesthetic buttressing to the establishment and maintenance of civic order. To the extent that they did so, in conjunction with the concession they made to the melancholy coming to bear on solitude, they can be said to have weakened the line of defense Renaissance humanism had customarily thrown up against the rush of the melancholy vogue radiating out of fifteenth century Florence.

Among those ascertaining an inner connection between the themes of civic engagement and moderation was Stefano Guazzo, who, in a treatment of the human passions complementing the stringent warning against melancholy solitude presented in *La civil conversazione*, utilized a commonplace comparison of the passions to a horse, "which when bridled is very useful and beneficial, but when unbridled is bad because it can send its rider over the precipice."⁹⁰ Of the literary genres bringing to a head the conflict between an enduring humanist plea for the rational mean in all mortal matters and the contention that a few specially gifted individuals are empowered to contravene ordinary rational limits, two above all served as prominent arenas for establishing the lines of battle. The first genre concerned itself with the theme of love, and the second, with the theme of poetic invention. In both of these respects the cinquecento humanists, when applying their principles with rigorous consistency, found themselves to be at cross-purposes both with the Platonic inspiration

⁹⁰ Guazzo, *Discorsi* (Ferrara: Vittorio Baldini, 1586), p. 43.

theory and with the “Aristotelian” theory of melancholy genius harnessed by the Florentine Platonists to the Platonic frenzies.

* * *

Under the telling title *Dialogo della medicina d'amore* Bartolomeo Arnigio (16th cent.) depicted the plight of a man who, having been smitten with the beauty of a woman, complains to a friend of being afflicted with such pain in his heart “that one can even see it from afar.”⁹¹ The friend, being learned in medical matters, is able to put to the service of his companion an instant diagnosis. The intense distress to which he is subjected, the friend proffered, is caused by melancholy, a severe psychic affliction provoked either by unrequited love or by an extended or permanent separation of the lover from the object of his passionate yearning. The remedy for one “so melancholic and afflicted,”⁹² counseled the medically astute friend, is to impose greater moderation on his amatory passion, the reason being that “loving another moderately and sweetly is never damaging or displeasing, whereas being overcome by an immoderate and violent love (*smisurato & violento amore*) always carries with it tribulation and anxiety.”⁹³

It was, moreover, not only a love of physical beauty that prompted pleas of moderation like that of Arnigio. Also prompting such pleas was the love for a higher form of beauty as represented in art and letters. Indeed, for one such critic of immoderate love, Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (1479–1552), an amorous passion for knowledge itself can be carried so far as to inflict grave damage on those it touches. As cautioned by Giraldi in his appropriately titled *Progymnasma adversus literas & literatos*, “a vehement and immoderate study and desire of letters bears much injury and corruption to our bodies.”⁹⁴ As for the disease most commonly associated with the lovelorn “injury and corruption” indicated by Giraldi, the early sixteenth-century civic advocate Cebá did not even allow a concession to Ficino’s linkage of love melancholy with genius deter him from placing restrictions on the amatory passions. Thus, while acknowledging that “he who loves is

⁹¹ Bartolomeo Arnigio, *Dialogo della medicina d'amore*. . . (Brescia: Appresso Francesco, & P. Maria Marchetti, 1566), fol. 3^r.

⁹² *Ibid.*, fol. 3^v.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 8^r.

⁹⁴ Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *Progymnasma adversus literas & literatos*, bound with *Dialogi duo de poetis nostrorum temporum* and *Epistola versu conscripta, in quae in direptione urbana passus est*. . . (Florence: 1551), p. 165. Also found in *Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel: Apud Thomam Guarinum, 1580), II, 422 ff.

comprised of a more melancholic constitution,” and further concurring to an extension of that concept to the love of knowledge, Cebá did not find cause thereby to furnish license to unbounded amatory yearning. Rather, as if to lampoon the ever more commonplace connection between love melancholy and genius, Cebá retorted that the lovelorn, “while being naturally more ingenious than others, would be of greater profit if, as a result of this violent passion of love, they were not so miserably out of joint (*miseramente stravolti*).”⁹⁵

Clearly, if the notion of heroic love in the philosophically reconstructed version of Ficino were to find inroad into the humanist overview, it needed to present itself, not in opposition to the humanist plea for moderation, but rather as a complementary adjunct to that plea. A way of doing so, illustrated by a handbook for princes authored by Giovanni Battista Pigna (1529–1575), is to permit exceptions to the rule of moderate love exclusively to the ruler of the realm, with everyone else subject to the tempering strictures imposed on it by reason. The basic thrust of Pigna’s handbook is to treat the prince as an embodiment of heroic virtue, noting in this connection, with help from the medical writers, that the hero “is so-called from the Greek word *eros*, signifying *amore*.” Declaring his intention to be one of guiding the prince, “step by step, in the light of love, to his greater excellence,” Pigna detected two principal stages in the realization of this lofty goal. At the first stage, following the author’s conceptual sequence, “when love and the honorable (*l’honesto*) are one and the same, there follows from it civil perfection,” and at the second stage, “divinity afterwards unites with these, making possible the birth of the heroic virtue (*la virtù heroica*).”⁹⁶

Concerning the last stage of princely advancement in particular, Pigna gave evidence of his conversance with the Ficinian provenance of the contemporary love vogue with the contention that the enamored hero-prince is one in whom “the heaviness of the body does not at all hinder the purity of his soul.”⁹⁷ Lest, however, his readers errantly misconstrue this regal exception to the tempering of love as authorizing the subjection of civic values to personal ones, Pigna hastened to accouter it with its proper civic context. “The hero,” as

⁹⁵ Cebá, *Il cittadino di repubblica*, cap. 47, p. 184.

⁹⁶ Giovanni Battista Pigna, *Il principe . . . , nel qual si descrive come debba essere il Principe Heroico . . .* (Venice: Appresso Francesco Sansovino, 1561), lib. I, fols. 1^v, 11^v.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, lib. II, fol. 46^v–47^r.

this civic appropriation of the Ficinian motif was put in no uncertain terms by Pigna, “is not called divine with respect to contemplation, nor even particularly with respect to religion; rather, he is called divine by so excelling other men in civil activity that he is no longer perceived to be of a human quality, but, by the grace of God, to be far superior to the others.”⁹⁸

It is not by chance that Pigna, a foremost advocate of civic humanism in its post-quattrocento form, is also to be counted among the leaders of the Horatian revival contemporaneously taking place in the field of poetic criticism. For, as previously noted, the ancient theory of versification most closely conforming with the Peripatetic call for the golden mean in political and ethical theory, besides Aristotle’s own theory as set forth in his *Poetics*, was that formulated by Horace. In this way, as we will now see, the Horatian school of criticism threw up another formidable obstacle to the contemporary vogue of melancholy genius favoring psychological, ethical, and aesthetic extremes over the moderating constraints imposed by reason.

“In our souls,” proclaimed the Italian emigré Giulio Cesare Scaligero (= Julius Caesar Scaliger, 1484–1558) in the heat of a famous polemic with Girolamo Cardano, “there is no part, no power, absolutely nothing whatever which can exist or be thought that may lack reason.” In keeping with this axiom Scaligero maintained that the origin of “so many errors, sins, and defects” characteristic of everyday human behavior belonged, not to the unerring reason of the mind, but to the erring affections of the body. And what in Cardano’s writings, we might ask, provoked this passionate defense of reason by Scaligero? Especially as revealed in the pages of his *De subtilitate*, Scaligero charged, Cardano had exhibited excessive credulity in the occult forces of nature. If a suspect theory like spontaneous generation can be said to have constituted one sticking point for Scaligero in this regard, another was what he believed to be excessive genial powers that Cardano had located in the melancholy humor.⁹⁹

From the standpoint of demonology, to be sure, there was little

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. I, fol. 11^v.

⁹⁹ Giulio Cesare Scaligero, *Exotericarum exercitationum liber quintus decimus, De subtilitate ad Hieronymum Cardanum* (Paris: Ex officina typographica Michaelis Vascosani, 1557), ex. 307, cap. 5, fol. 391^v. On Cardano’s side to this polemic see below, pp. 336 ff. Educated at Bologna, Scaligero spent most of his adult life in the employ of the bishop of Agen in France and assumed French citizenship. On the Cardano-Scaligero polemic see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 283–84.

to distinguish Scaligero's view of melancholic alienation from Cardano's nature-based one. "Melancholics," declared Scaligero in much the same skeptical spirit as Cardano, "tremble with fear in the shadows because their spirits, not their souls, are black." But more rigorously consistent than Cardano in this regard, Scaligero also carried the same line of reasoning over to those melancholics reputed to be sages (*sapientes*), so that, as he put it, "having been led away from sensibles into the innermost penetralia of the intellect, they do not perceive many things carried out right under their eyes."¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, while considering one facet of Ficino's two-faceted genial doctrine to be contrary to his rationalist principles, namely, excitation by natural melancholy, he apparently did not feel the same about the corresponding Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy, to which, as brought out in an ambitiously conceived work on poetics, he continued to pay his respects.

Thus, in keeping with a commonplace Platonic theme, Scaligero distinguished between mere versifiers (*versificatores*), possessing as they do a merely technical skill of language, from truly inspired poets (*poetae*) "seized by frenzy and abstracted from vulgar matter." For this reason, declared Scaligero, Plato "is less to be esteemed for his political writings, by whose authority certain barbarians and savage men seek to abuse poets by casting them out of the republic," than for his poetic writings, by whose authority he eloquently extolled poets as versifying prophets.¹⁰¹ The basic authoritative guide for Scaligero's poetic theory, however, despite the lip service to divine frenzy here indicated, was not Plato, but an Aristotle emancipated from the nature-based conjectures of the *Problemata*.¹⁰²

For Scaligero poetics were, at heart, a branch of rhetoric, and like rhetoric, of which Aristotle was also a foremost ancient theorist, emphasis was to be placed, not on a genial aspiration to a place

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, fols. 391^v-92^r.

¹⁰¹ Scaligero, *Poetices libri septem* ([Lyons]: Apud Antonium Vincentium, 1561), lib. I, cap. 2, pp. 6, 10. Simultaneously printed in Geneva by Jean Crespin.

¹⁰² Thus Schmitt et al., *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 722, terms Scaligero's *Poetices*, quite apart from any pretense to divine inspiration, a "prescriptive work [that] gives the would-be writer specific instructions on how to compose, according to rhetoric and poetics." Still more insistent on diluting the Platonic inspiration doctrine in Scaligero is Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, "Humanism and Poetics," in Rabil, *Renaissance Humanism*, III, declaring, p. 132, that an "echo of the Neoplatonic image of the poet as a creator similar to God does not mean that Scaliger accepts the concept of furor and divine inspiration."

beyond the finite middle, but rather to a harmonious balance between extremes. So far as the Platonic frenzy doctrine played into Scaligero's prescriptive poetic theory, it was in a characteristic Platonic identification of the frenzies with music. Following this reasoning Scaligero maintained that, at bottom, poetry is free of a need for words, so that, "if song should be taken away, the poetic essence would nonetheless remain."¹⁰³ It was along similar lines, as previously pointed out, that poetic critics like Landino, Vida, and Parrasio discerned an corresponding compatibility between the Horatian rules of poetry and a Platonic inspiration theory claiming to transcend the rules of reason.

Theorizing about poetry under a comparable presumption of an underlying compatibility between the Platonic frenzy doctrine and Horatian rules of poetic decorum was the Horatian commentator Francesco Luisini (1523–1568). And how did Luisini reconcile these theoretically opposing ways of conceptualizing the act of poetic invention? The link between them, according to Luisini, consists of the supposition that the poet is instilled with a drive to imitate the rationally formulated ideas of God.¹⁰⁴ Among late Renaissance Horatians, however, Luisini was the exception rather than the rule. More typical of this school of thought was Francesco Berni (1498–1535), who acridly derided those poets who "take their pleasure in being called insane, declaring that they are *furiosi* and have their *furor divinus*, and that they are flying above the stars, and other such nonsense."¹⁰⁵

Another late Renaissance critic deeming Horace's poetic rules of aesthetic decorum to contradict rather than agree with Plato's inspiration theory, Tommaso Correa (16th cent.), sharply ridiculed those who believed with Democritus and Plato that true poetry cannot be achieved unless the poet "is excited by a certain inflammation and divine efflux of frenzy."¹⁰⁶ Holding themselves to be moved by the holy spirit, Correa charged, the purveyors of this credo were really self-indulgent and uncultured men in search of a rationale for vio-

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 1, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Francesco Luisini, *In librum Q. Horatii Flacii de arte poetica commentarius* (Venice: Aldus, 1554), xxxv, fol. 59^r.

¹⁰⁵ Francesco Berni, *Dialogo contra i poeti*, Modena: 1540. Also found in *Opere* (Milan: G. Daelli, 1844), pp. 3–33, with passage cited at p. 5. On Berni's ridicule of the divine frenzy theory see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 261.

¹⁰⁶ Tommaso Correa, *In librum de arte poetica Q. Horatii Flacci explanationes* (Venice: Apud Franciscum de Francis Senensem, 1587), p. 99. On Correa's strict Horatian precepts see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 215 ff., with his rejection of the divine frenzy theory indicated at p. 220.

lating the strict rules of poetic form laid down by Horace. Claiming to poetize under the force of a divinely instilled frenzy, in truth they were mad in the conventional, medically based sense of the term *furor*. These despicable souls, Correa continued his attack, adopted a life-style resembling that of the monastic hermits of old, preferring, in the name of their muses, to leave off bathing their dirtied bodies and to display uncut nails and hair to their audience. Though desirous of convincing both themselves and others "that they are able to arrive at the first and highest place of the poets," complained Correa, in truth these sorry excuses for poets "have failed to summon either industry in writing, or diligence in composing, or judgment in emending what they have produced."¹⁰⁷

Helping to corroborate this Horatian way of looking at poetic invention was an Aristotelian way. It goes without saying, however, that if the principles of Aristotelian poetic theory were to be made consistent with the Horatian plea for rational decorum, it was most certainly those spelled out, not in the spuriously ascribed *Problemata*, but in the authenticated *Poetics*. It is not by chance, accordingly, that a leading voice among those assailing the Platonic frenzy theory in the name of rational decorum in the poetic act, Ludovico Castelvetro (1505–1571), did so in a commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*.

The belief in poetic inspiration by divine frenzy, claimed Castelvetro, "having its origin and birth from the ignorance of the vulgar, has been developed and favored by the vainglory of the poets." Far from lending support to the frenzy theory as the Platonists would persuade us, declared Castelvetro, Aristotle denied "that poetry is a special gift of God bestowed on one man rather than on another, as is the gift of prophecy and other like privileges which are not natural and are not common to all." Indeed, insisted Castelvetro, Plato himself did not really believe in the idea of divine frenzy, presenting it in his writings as merely a humorous hypothesis. "When Plato mentions it in his books," proffered Castelvetro, "he is undoubtedly joking, as is his custom in similar things."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100. In the light of modern culture Correa's sarcastic description of those poets claiming to work under the powers of the divine frenzy has a familiar ring to it, reminding us of the "beatnik" mode of poetizing as critiqued by its beraters.

¹⁰⁸ Ludovico Castelvetro, *Poetica d'Aristotele, vulgarizzati et sposta* (Basel: Pietro de Sedabonis, 1576), parte II, partic. 1, p. 65. On Castelvetro's rejection of the Platonic inspiration doctrine see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 286–7. Cf. H.B. Charlton,

A further inference to be drawn from an approach to poetry like that evinced by Castelvetro is not only the expropriation of Aristotle from the Platonic superstructure imposed on him by Ficino, but also the expropriation of Aristotle from himself—that is, the Aristotle of moderation and civic mindedness from the pseudo-Aristotle allowing genial extremes through melancholy alienation. A critic bringing this inference to the surface of his poetic theory—this time in a commentary on Horace—was Giovanni Pigna, who therein not only reconfirmed the civic perspective conditioning the earlier-cited *Il principe*, but also, more directly to the point of Horatian aesthetic theory, undercut any thought of attempting harmonization between the principles of rational decorum and the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius. As for melancholics at large, attested Pigna, “Horace was of the belief that they are insane, and, since they lack reason, ought rather to be called beasts.” And as for melancholic poets among these, Pigna further invoked Horace as a reminder to those encircling their heads with hellebore that the customary function of that plant is to furnish a remedy to melancholy, not to nurture melancholy as an aid to poetizing. “Horace,” according to Pigna, “confessed that he would rather not be a poet at all than to rave like a madman in this manner.”¹⁰⁹

Following the proposition, earlier evinced by Alberti among others, that the auditory and visual arts are reciprocally translatable into one another, the principles of Horatian criticism were likewise made applicable to the visual arts. During the quattrocento, we earlier saw, the vision of ideal beauty famously articulated by Alberti resonated not only with a Ciceronian ethical, political, and rhetorical ideal of moderation and a balanced interplay between solitary scholarly pursuit and civic responsibilities, but also by an aesthetic ideal of balance and symmetry as formulated by Vitruvius. A cele-

Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester Univ. Press, 1913), esp. pp. 20–21. For the background to this debate see Baxter Hathaway, *The Age of Criticism: the Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 1 ff., and *Marvels and Commonplaces: Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 43 ff., with Castelvetro treated at pp. 60–64. For evidence of Castelvetro's concurrent attraction to the Italian evangelical movement see Salvatore Caponetto, *The Protestant Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, trans. Anne C. Tedeschi and John Tedeschi, Vol. 43: Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies (Kirksville, Mo.: Thomas Jefferson Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 260–63.

¹⁰⁹ Pigna, *Poetica Horatiana* (Venice: Apud Vincentium Valgrisium, 1561), p. 71. Concerning the civic-based *Il principe* see above, pp. 233 ff.

brated cinquecento architect who can be singled out as further putting into practice the ancient precepts laid down by Vitruvius was Andrea Palladio (1508–1580).¹¹⁰ Palladio's counterparts among the poetic theorists were the Horatians, who applied to the expression of poetry the rules of balance and symmetry that Cicero had applied to the art of rhetoric.

The underlying premise allowing the coalescence of artistic with poetic theory was succinctly put in its later Renaissance expression by an anonymous writer, now generally identified as Federico Ceruti (1531–1611), maintaining that “no one even mediocly learned is ignorant of the fact that poetry is intimately and fraternally related to the other noble arts by a certain association existing between them;” for this reason, the writer concluded, “all the arts and sciences are so bound and connected that one assiduously serves the other, and one does not readily acquire knowledge of one without the other.”¹¹¹ Among the Renaissance theorists of the arts, as we will now take note, such a presumption, by clearing the way for the expansion of the melancholy vogue to include the visual arts along with their literary and philosophical siblings, also correlatively cleared the way to those who, following the guidelines of aesthetic invention like those of the Horatians, sought to impose rules of decorum on the artist's endeavor to imagine and shape beautiful forms.

* * *

As pointed out by an instructor of the classics at Padua, Bernardino Daniello (d. 1565), “poetry was likened by the very wise men of antiquity to painting,” their reasoning being that “painting is said to be nothing else but a tacit and mute poem, and, contrarily, poetry is called speaking painting.”¹¹² Concurring with this now commonplace opinion from the vantage point of the painters was the Venetian scholar Ludovico Dolce (1506–1568), who invoked the admired example of his fellow citizen Titian (= Tiziano Vecellio, ca. 1477–1576) to make the same point. On a surface level, Dolce admitted, painting and poetry, by employing differing media of expression and appealing to diverse senses, are more notable for their differences

¹¹⁰ Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, pp. 21–2.

¹¹¹ [Federico Ceruti], *De re poetica libellus incerti auctoris* (Verona: Apud Hieronymum Discipulum, 1588), cap. 9, p. 10. On the attribution of this tract to Ceruti see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 328–29.

¹¹² Bernardino Daniello, *Della poetica* (1536), in Weinberg, *Trattati*, I, 242.

than their similarities. In this regard, Dolce acknowledged, “the painter is concerned to imitate, by dint of lines and colors (whether it be on a flat surface of panel, wall, or canvas) everything that presents itself to the eye, whereas the poet, through the medium of words, characteristically imitates not only what presents itself to the eye, but also what presents itself to the intellect.” At a deeper level of analysis, however, Dolce confirmed the underlying kinship of painting and poetry, declaring that “they are alike in so many other respects that they can almost be called brothers.”¹¹³

In light of the Platonic revival in sway at the time of their scholarly careers, Daniello and Dolce could have presented, as one distinctive point of intersection between poets and painters, a shared proclivity to melancholy as a result of their intense solitary labors and its rationalization as a natural concomitant of the divine frenzies. Or, just as consistently, they could have countered that rationalization of poetic and artistic melancholy with “Horatian” precepts of aesthetic criticism, now reinforced by the architectural precepts of Vitruvius. While Daniello and Dolce appear to have been reticent to enter into this controversial area, other contributors to aesthetic theory, such as Paolo Pino (fl. 1534–1565), were not. For Pino, a fellow Venetian of Dolce also with special attraction to Titian, melancholy was something to be avoided by the artist rather than, as some maintained, something to be encouraged and cultivated in association with the Platonic frenzy theory.

The reason that melancholy is often detected in painters, Pino noted, is that “painting does not require corporeal toil, but keeps a man idle and melancholy with his natural virtues fixed in the idea.” The painter, however, Pino conceded, need not accept his melancholic tribulations, since the antidotes to combat them are effective and plentiful. At the forefront of these as prescribed by Pino, intended to counteract excessive physical inactivity and social isolation on the part of the artists, are a combination of physical exercise and interaction with companions. More precisely put, “it will be a useful thing

¹¹³ Ludovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura . . . intitolato l'Aretino . . .* (Venice: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1557), fol. VII. See also reprint and trans. by Mark W. Roskill, annexed to *Dolce's 'Aretino' and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1968, p. 97. On this dialogue, explicitly geared to comparing Florence's Michelangelo unfavorably to Venice's Titian (a close friend of Aretino, and his portraitist), see Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy*, pp. 83–84, 123–24, and Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis*, p. 11.

for the maintenance of this individual to exercise himself in horse-back riding, playing ball, wrestling, fencing, or, less strenuously, walking in the open air and conversing with some friend about cheerful matters."¹¹⁴ The salutary effect of this regimen, Pino maintained, is that it "makes a person agile, settles his digestion, dissipates his melancholy, and purifies his virtue."¹¹⁵

The attitude here indicated, it is clear, stands at complete odds with another attitude increasingly displayed by art critics of Pino's day characterizing melancholy as more of a boon than a bane to the artist's vocation. Putting this contrast in still sharper relief in a further contribution to the theory of painting—this by overtly confronting the current literary vogue encouraging the coddling of melancholy in artists—was the Roman academician Giovanni Battista Armenini (1530–1609). "It has come to pass in some people," lamented Armenini, "that, through excessive curiosity and a desire to understand all the precepts of painting in a limited time, their minds have become so full of strange confusion and the members of their bodies so fatigued that they are changed from cheerful into melancholic, from healthy into sick, and from wise into capricious and eccentric beings." In response Armenini declared painters to be subject to the same ironclad rule of behaviour as the rest of mankind, namely, that "the more we frenetically overwork the mind (*quanto furore si vuole affaticare l'ingegno*), the more it becomes retarded."¹¹⁶ In setting forth this advice to artists Armenini had in mind more than what might be taken to be merely a regrettable by-product of their lonely and psychologically demanding profession. As revealed in his elaboration of this advice, he saw as his task the ameliorating of an affliction

¹¹⁴ Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura* (Venice: Per Paulo Gherardo, 1548), fol. 31^r. These passages also found in Paola Barocchi, ed. *Scritti d'Arte del Cinquecento*, 3 vols. (Milan/Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1973), II, 1353–54. On Pino's general aesthetic views see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, pp. 84–85, and on his hostility to melancholy in the artist, Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, p. 106.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fols. 31^r–v.

¹¹⁶ Giovanni Battista Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura libri tre* (Ravenna: Appresso Francesco Tebaldini, 1587), lib. I, cap. 6, p. 50. Also Barocchi, *Scritti d'Arte*, II, 1483. This work is also found in facsimile, Hildesheim/New York: Georg Olms, 1971, and in an English trans. by Edward J. Olszewski, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting* (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1977), with these passages at p. 121. On Armenini's art theories see Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy*, p. 139 and passim, and on his ridicule of the melancholy vogue among artists, Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, p. 92. Sidestepping this question in his treatment of Armenini is Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Technique to Meta-technique* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 94–98.

that had become all the more widespread as it had become popularly perceived as a virtue of the artistic profession.

“A cursed abuse (*un maledetto abuso*) has entered into the minds of the common people, and perhaps also into those of the wise,” lamented Armenini, arising from the misguided opinion “that a painter cannot be excellent who has not first been tarnished by an ugly and wicked vice, accompanied, as it were, by a capricious and fantastic humor causing many eccentricities to take place in the brain.” Accordingly, charged Armenini, “many foolish masters of this art go about feeding their minds with this error, affecting themselves with melancholic aberrations (*maninconica bizzaria*) providing no profit to them whatsoever unless it lies in the claim that, in this way, they are very unusual men.”¹¹⁷ To counteract this regrettable trend among painters Armenini posited a very different standard of aesthetic expression, holding it to be subject, not to the uncontrolled phantasies of an unrestrained and melancholy imagination, but to the precepts of a controlling reason. In reply to those artists who, instead of eradicating melancholy as they should, unwisely encourage and even cultivate their melancholy, Armenini enjoined: “Therefore it is good to exert oneself with moderation of the mind in all things (*con moderacion d'animo in tutte le cose*), especially in such difficulties and labors as these.”¹¹⁸

If we were to stop with the examples of Pino and Armenini, we might mistakenly conclude that the artistic movement termed “Mannerism” by scholarly convention¹¹⁹ was more interested in a return to abstract mathematical rules of art, reminiscent of those prescribed the previous century by Alberti, than in the advocacy of singular artistic expression through divine inspiration. But a further

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, lib. III, cap. 15, pp. 206–207. Also Barocchi, *Scritti d'Arte*, II, 1484, and Olszewski, ed. *True Precepts*, p. 274.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 6, pp. 50–51. Also Barocchi, *Scritti d'Arte*, II, 1483, and Olszewski, ed. *True Precepts*, p. 121. On this artistic outlook see also Olszewski's preface, p. 37: “Armenini . . . stressed the importance of manners for the artist; boorishness, eccentric behavior, secretiveness, and social aberrations were not to be tolerated in painters. Thus, our author rejected the common view of the Saturnine nature of the artist as moody, and creating out of divine frenzy.”

¹¹⁹ Taking exception to the word Mannerism by the art historians to cover the many different art styles of the late cinquecento—as to the adjective “anti-classical” applied to the Mannerist movement owing to the difficulty of defining the word “classical” to which it is opposed—is Cronin, *Flowering of the Renaissance*, esp. pp. 153 ff., and appendix B, pp. 297–301. Here the term is employed loosely as a tag for a tradition of art theory that, the question of style aside, chronologically coincides with the religious reform movement in its Tridentine and post-Tridentine stages.

exposure to the art theorists in this period, to come out in the next chapter, will reveal that, in response to theological demands of the Catholic Reformation, they were far from being in agreement on the question of how artistic invention is optimally achieved. Indeed, with artists like Michelangelo and Titian as their artistic paragons, they will sometimes be shown to contradict themselves within the pages of the same tract, one moment calling for rational order and decorum in the arts and the next moment calling for divine inspiration that could only have the effect of encouraging eccentricity rather than reasoned conformity among artists. Their literary counterparts were poetic theorists in the footsteps of Landino, Vida, and Parrasio who, as brought out in a previous chapter, saw no difficulty in reconciling Horace's rules of metrical artifice and decorum with Plato's concession to a few divinely inspired souls to break through the limitations imposed by those rules.

* * *

Even as the aforementioned medical, theological, and humanist arguments against the genial potential of melancholy mounted up during the later Italian Renaissance, the arguments on the other side of the debate, as will now be our object to assess, equally mounted up within the bounds of these same traditions. Indeed, the increasingly invective character of this opposition could itself be taken as testimony to the upswing of the melancholy vogue. Aside from the intrinsic appeal of the doctrine of melancholy genius to melancholics themselves, we might ask to what principal causes we can attribute its persisting popularity? While some of these were most certainly secular, others, as notably attested by Battista da Crema, were piously religious. They illustrate that it is not always easy to disentangle the secularized motivations which we customarily associate with the Renaissance from the piously religious currents which we customarily associate with the Reformation.

For some Catholic reformers the philosophy of Ficino, which represented not only a synthesis of Aristotle with Plato but also of both of these ancient pagan philosophers with Christ, posed a fitting intellectual response to the Protestant undercutting of the principle of rational mediation between men and God. Serving to crystallize the Ficinian synthesis of nature and supernature, we have emphasized, is the consummation of human capability known as human genius. Bolstering a shared interest in the origin of genius between the

Renaissance Platonists and the Catholic reformers was their concurrence on two closely related presumptions. The first presumption is that the indestructible bedrock of genius, the human soul, is immortal, and the second presumption, that the optimal condition for the realization of human genius is the solitary life of contemplation. If one decisive effect of the symbiotic relationship between the secular and religious revivals of this historical period was to put at the disposal of the Catholic reformers a foremost "Renaissance" philosophical insight about the divine origin of human genius, a reciprocal effect was to put at the disposal of those spearheading the Renaissance cultural revival—the philosophers, the poets, and the artists—the religious presumption of the Catholic reformers that human genius is both inherently indestructible and its powers most fully discharged in a state of solitary ecstasy and contemplation.

As the vogue of melancholy genius evolved in the course of the cinquecento and early seicento—the subject of the next chapter, it continued to display further evidence of its innermost involvement with these two fundamental planks of the Catholic faith. As represented by the contributors to this vogue, the presence of natural melancholy in the process of intellectual and spiritual transcendence is not something unconditionally to be expunged from the body. Rather, it is something first to be encouraged and even cultivated in its role as a God-given natural auxiliary of the invigorating divine frenzies, only to be expunged after the frenzies have completed their cathartic functions. In the following chapter we will test this thesis with special attention to four subjects: religious mysticism and prophecy, poetry and the arts, the occult sciences, and natural philosophy. More particularly, with the love frenzy as mediator, the benefits of mystical and prophetic acumen will be shown to be transferrable to the entire span of genial activities deemed by participants in the melancholy vogue to share with mysticism and prophecy the gifts of divinely instigated ecstasy and illumination. In all of these variations of human genius, we will see, those insistent on the need to transcend the mediocre norm in the manner of the ancient heroes and early Christian saints found that melancholy, instead of being an unqualified detriment to the spiritual life as its censors would have it, could be turned into a positive beneficiary of the spiritual life.

Drastically altering the terms in which the melancholy vogue was expressed with the merging of the cinquecento into the seicento, but still leaving its basic constituents potentially intact, were a series of

revolutionary historical events—among them the geographical discoveries, religious schism, and the scientific revolution—that had the effect of opening up a heretofore closed world of established hierarchical levels and, correlatively, of dissolving the clearcut lines that had previously demarcated the traditional philosophical categories. As will be brought out in this regard in the following chapters, two novel intellectual developments above all forced a reconsideration of the way in which both exponents and opponents of the Ficinian genial theory could argue their respective positions. The first development, prompted by the 1543 publication of the *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* by the Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), was one replacing the traditional geostatic-geocentric theory of planetary order with a heliostatic-heliocentric theory that divested human beings of their central place in the universe. And the second development was the addition to the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical mix of a novel metaphysical scheme envisioned by the Neapolitan Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588).

As spelled out in his *De rerum natura iuxta propria principia* of 1565, and expanded upon in a revised republication of his text in 1586, Telesio replaced the four elements of the traditional cosmic hierarchy with contrasting principles of heat and cold and, in conjunction, replaced the customary philosophical antithesis between ideas and sense experience with one that found the senses to be inextricable from the ideas presumed to govern them.¹²⁰ In this way Telesio posed a basic philosophical challenge not only to the teleological presuppositions of the inherited world view holding movement to be aimed at ultimate rest, but also to a corresponding presupposition holding sensual experience to be an obstruction to divine illumination. Carried to its apogee in Bruno, the revised world view encouraged by the Copernican and Telesian alternatives to the inherited cosmic and philosophical systems was one that opened up to infinity.

“There has been naturally placed in all men an infinite desire to know many things (*desiderio infinito di conoscere assaissime*).” With those words, incorporated into the preface of a mid-cinquecento history of the Turks, Ludovico Domenichi (1515–1564) articulated a sentiment

¹²⁰ On Telesio’s metaphysical system see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 370–1; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 201–6; and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, 192–6, and *Storia*, II, pp. 644–56. Perceiving occult strains in Telesio’s philosophy is Walker, *Magic*, pp. 189 ff. Telesio, from Cosenza but with ties to Padua, was the founder of the Accademia Cosentina at Naples.

popularly associated decades later with the Faust legend.¹²¹ One of the more notable ramifications of this sentiment, famously travestied by Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) in his play *Doctor Faustus*, lies in its role as a guidepost in the campaign to justify occult studies. Another ramification, as we will see, not infrequently intertwined with the magical one, lies in its role as a guidepost of those intent on establishing the infinite origin of human genius. At the crux of the debate over the provenance of genius, as we will also see, lay the question of whether natural melancholy should be considered a divinely anointed helpmate to the divinely instilled “infinite desire to know many things” or its demonically favored shackle.

¹²¹ Ludovico Domenichi, preface to Theodoro Spandugino's *Dell'origine de' principi Turchi, & de' costumi di quella natione* (Florence: Appresso Torrentino Impressor Ducale, 1551), sig. a ii'. For this quotation see also Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 319. For scholarly literature surrounding the historical Faust and his posthumous legend see my *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, pp. 256, 271–72, notes 4 and 85. On Domenichi's role as social critic see Grendler, *Critics*, pp. 65 ff. Concerning Domenichi's trans. of Alberti's *De pictura* see above, p. 63n.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LATE RENAISSANCE VOGUE OF MELANCHOLY GENIUS: THE LITERARY, ART, OCCULT AND PHILOSOPHICAL STRAINS

A. *The Mystical, Prophetic, and Amatory Testaments*

In an early sixteenth-century commentary on Plato's *Symposium* (1614) Luca Belli (fl. 1600) reiterated a number of themes contained in the earlier more famous commentary by Ficino, among them the Platonic frenzies. Following Ficino, Belli distinguished between two kinds of frenzied alienation, one "by natural infirmity through its occupation of the brain and perturbation of the humors," and the other "by a divine instinct which ravishes a man and carries him outside of himself."¹ What set apart Belli's justification of the Platonic frenzy doctrine from Ficino's, however, betraying the changed cultural context within which it was formulated, lay in the way he fashioned his apologetic.

Adopting Ficino's rationale for the *furor divinus*, based on the presumption of an inner spiritual continuity between the theology of the ancient gentile and Jewish sages and the theology of Christ, Belli, that the Platonic frenzy doctrine might better meet the demands of the religious reformers, reinforced it with a biblical rationale. The four kinds of divine frenzy celebrated by Plato—prophetic, mystical, amatory, and poetic—corresponded for Belli, respectively, to "four divine gifts which St. Paul mentions in the first book of Corinthians, that is to say, prophecy, rapture, religion, and the gift of languages (*la Profezia, il Ratto, la Religione, & il Dono della linguae*), all of which serve to facilitate our alienation from the senses."² In this way Belli gave a characteristically Reformation twist to the Renaissance-revived doctrine of divine frenzy, the consequence of which was to endow it not only with an a philosophical underpinning, but also with a safely scriptural one into the bargain.

¹ Luca Belli, *Commento sopra il convito di Platone* (Macerata: Gio. Battista Carboni, 1614), cap. 6, pp. 67–68.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

Giving a comparably religious twist to the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius as Belli gave to the Platonic frenzy doctrine was Antonio Zara (d. 1620), who, under the heading “virtues of melancholy” (*melancholiae virtutes*) in his *Anatomia ingeniorum* (1615), included among melancholy’s benefits the fostering of contemplation. To be sure, acknowledged the future Istrian bishop, melancholy sometimes displays features, prefigured by the ancient misanthrope Timon of Athens, not so easily turned to higher contemplative goals; those under the its influence, Zara granted, are observed, like Timon, to be “sorrowful, . . . gloomy and alienated from all commerce with others, and severe in countenance, with their eyes grimly staring, their eyebrows creased, and their faces wrinkled.”³ But to stop there, Zara understood, would be to treat melancholy as a wholly pathological state with no inborn capacity to assist the immortal soul in breaking out of its finite boundaries. Another critical feature of melancholy recognized by Zara, accordingly, turning it to a far more propitious effect than that experienced by Timon, is to help detach the soul of the solitary from worldly things and reattach it to heavenly things.

From his amalgamated philosophical-theological vantage point Zara prayerfully implored God “to bestow the virtues of melancholy upon us, so that we might always meditate on the torments His son endured on the beam of the cross for the redemption of mankind!” Likening the tears of the sorrowful penitent to those of the melancholy Heraclitus, Zara entreated Christ that “His extended arms embrace our sighs, that His pierced heart amputate the wound of sin from us, that his blood pour from that wound so as to cleanse us of our filth, and that his punctured feet crush our pride and expunge all faults from our bodies and minds!” To this very admirable end, he beseeched, “increase, O Lord, the [black] bile within us, so that we might become angry before sin . . . and overcome our deceitful vices!”⁴

The rendition of melancholy presented by Zara, it would appear, holds it to be as salubrious in its original cold as in its heated mode, a reading of the condition confirmed by the author’s contention that the melancholy triggered by vehement meditation begins with inflammation and ends in frigidity; as Zara explained: “heat erupts

³ Antonio Zara, *Anatomia ingeniorum et scientiarum* (Venice: Ambrosii Dei, & Fratrum, 1615), sec. I, memb. 6, p. 63. On this work see Thorndike, *Magic*, VII, 281–82. Zara’s bishopric was located in Pedena.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67. On this passage see Schleiner, *Melancholy*, p. 39.

from an assiduous agitation of the mind and causes the weakened animal and vital spirits to dissipate, leaving the brain cold and dry."⁵ That a cold form of the black humor is capable of ministering to the needs of solitary meditation was further conceded by the Veronan canon Cipriano Giambelli (16th cent.), who had his protagonist, "il Padre Teologo," grant in a dialogue that the presence of "an annoying and pernicious melancholy" (*una noiosa, e nociva malinconia*)⁶ does not necessarily preclude its constructive use as an agent of contemplation. Declares Giambelli's protagonist: "Very useful are both solitude and melancholy, in such wise that the solitary life holds the mind recollected so that it does not wander hither and thither in quest of sensible things, and melancholy, which is born from an abundance of coldness and dryness, has the effect of fixing and stabilizing our thoughts, and renders us, as it were, stable and firm in sweet and delightful contemplation."⁷

For most religious theorists working under the sway of the Platonic revival, however, it was not melancholy's reputed role as a stabilizing anchor to contemplation that generally recommended it as an aid to the spiritual life, but its incendiary nature. In this way, as Ficino had pointed the way, it could be made adaptable to a corresponding Platonic theory of a comparably incendiary divine frenzy. As pointed up in the earlier case of Battista da Crema, a foremost beneficiary of Ficino's theory of melancholy genius was a Catholic clergy seeking to reconcile the stringent demands imposed upon them by the religious reform movement and the speculative ideas of the Platonic movement spreading throughout Europe. Another beneficiary was a pious laity which, addressing itself to the same spiritual issues as the clergy, discerned in melancholy, not an impediment to Heaven, but rather a God-given aid to the soul's heavenbound journey.

Illustrating this second category of melancholy rationalizers was the Venetian patrician Marco Antonio Mocenigo (fl. 1580), who made explicit connection between the ecstatic trances of solitary mystics and the moderately adust form of melancholy described in the relevant section of the Aristotelian *Problemata*. "Just as birds leave the earth with the aid of their wings and seek out heavenly abodes,"

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶ Cipriano Giambelli, *Il diamerone ove si ragiona della natura*. . . (Venice: Appresso Giorgio Angelieri, 1589), giorn. prima, p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

reveled Mocenigo, “so does Plato in his *Phaedrus* attribute wings to souls by which they may take leave of earthly things, that is, the senses, and ascend to Heaven.” But Plato, Mocenigo was persuaded, did not stand alone among the ancient philosophers in his adherence to this belief. “Aristotle taught this same idea in another way,” he averred, “since he maintained that men who are excellent in any art are melancholics.”⁸

The key to an underlying consensus between the Platonic and Peripatetic genial theories, Ficino had instructed Mocenigo, lay in the presumption that melancholy is capable, with the application of a modicum of heat, of becoming transformed from a debilitating drag upon the mind into a dynamic propellant capable of thrusting the mind into a higher state of consciousness. His restatement of this consensus runs as follows. “The more the body is contracted,” observed Mocenigo, “the more easily does the soul labor. The first function is accomplished through melancholy, and the second through one’s own inner virtue of soul, by means of which it achieves greater freedom and separation from the body.”⁹ Thus, Mocenigo was persuaded, Aristotle fully subscribed to the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy, and conversely, “both Plato and Aristotle teach that speculative men are melancholics.”¹⁰

As Plato and Aristotle also pointed out for their Renaissance followers, sometimes separately and sometimes in tandem, rare powers of mystical ecstasy are often accompanied by equally rare powers of prophetic illumination. Invoking the help of both authorities to make this point was Francesco Verino the Second (= De’Vieri, d. 1590), who proclaimed in a discourse on demons: “The frequent prophesying of the truth, and the extensive reasonings which have been effected even in foreign languages not at all understood by the person who is speaking, cannot proceed from anything other than a virtue which is above nature, and hidden to us.” Of the Aristotelian writings singled out by Verino as lending testimony to this insight, the authentically ascribed treatise on dreams spoke as directly to his point as the spuriously ascribed *Problemata*. In the former tract, according to Verino, Aristotle referred to certain diviners of his time liv-

⁸ Marco Antonio Mocenigo, *De anima, eisque divino ad Deum raptu* (Venice: Apud Franciscum Zilettum, 1581), lib. I, cap. 27, pp. 289–90.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 28, p. 317.

ing in the vicinity of the columns of Hercules whose uncannily accurate predictive powers could be explained only by an inspirational potency transcending those latently residing in nature; "this virtue," Verino declared, "as Socrates tells us in the amorous *Convivium* of Plato, is nothing else but an angel or a demon." And in the latter tract Aristotle furnished the Platonic frenzy theory with a valuable natural medium, so that, as restated by Verino, "it is possible that one in whom the melancholy humor abounds is sometimes able to foresee the future," recounting afterwards what he has foreseen, usually in a strange idiom, without understanding what he is saying.¹¹

The enkindling of melancholy to produce such sublime results as the foregoing often suggested to their authors a related theme central to the Platonic revival, the amatory frenzy, with the solitary mystic or prophet also to be construed as a kind of divinely inebriated lover. Succinctly putting the Platonic basis for the love vogue in terms of what by his by his time had become a commonplace distinction carried over from Ficino's *De amore*, Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565) proclaimed before what was now clearly a formalized "Florentine Academy": "Since there are two Venuses, it is also necessary that there be two loves. One . . . is heavenly, supremely good, and most praiseworthy, whereas the other is vulgar."¹² Reiterating this theme, Annibal Romei (16th cent.) declared love frenzy to be "the celestial progeny of the heavenly Venus, which love immoderately burns and enkindles the Seraphs and all the other angels;" infused by this divinely sent form of love, Romei averred, "not only the young, but

¹¹ Francesco Verino, il Secondo (= de'Vieri), *Discorso . . . intorno a' dimonii, volgarmente chiamati spiriti* (Florence: Bartolomeo Sermartelli, 1576) pars I, pp. 25–26. Verino could claim an indirect but personal tie, through his teacher Diacetto, to Ficino's Florentine circle. Evidence of his synthetical approach to the philosophical traditions is further found in his *Vere conclusioni di Platone conformi alla dottrina Christiana et a quella d'Aristoteles* (Venice: 1589), cited in Garin, *Italian Philosophy*, p. 130n. Cf. Garin, *Filosofia Italiana*, II, 587–8.

¹² Benedetto Varchi, *Sopra sette dubbi d'amore lezione una, letta pubblicamente nell'Accademia Fiorentina la prima domenica di Giugno, 1554*, in *Opere*, 2 vols. (Triste: Lloyd Austriaco, 1859), II, 535. According to Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 114–15, Varchi credited Diacetto even more than Ficino with influencing his views of love. Taking exception to a Platonic reading of Varchi's views on love, however, is Cherchi, "Dossier for the Study of Jealousy," in Beecher and Ciavolella, *Eros and Anteros*, maintaining, pp. 129–30, that the reasoning and distinctions set forth by Varchi in his speculations on love demonstrate his "Aristotelian inclination and distinctions" that, at bottom, "were opposed to Ficino's notion of love." Cherchi thus offers Varchi as a Renaissance witness, questionable in this writer's view, that the Aristotelian better than the Platonic tradition fostered a positive view of jealousy.

also old men, monks, and married people are permitted to become enamored.”¹³ For this school of thinkers it was of course tempting to consider only the vulgar form of love to be identifiable with the condition diagnosed by the physicians as melancholy. As the medical writers had long cautioned them, however, the disturbances of the black bile were as liable to afflict the lover of superterrestrial as of terrestrial objects.

Linguistically, the Platonic division of love into two kinds were sometimes indicated by two different Italian words for the alienated states to which they referred, with “insanity” (*pazzia*) applied to mental illness and “frenzy” (*furor*, *furia*), to divinely incited alienation. Adhering to such a linguistic distinction, for example, was Michelangelo Biondo (1497–1565), who, in a Platonically inspired celebration of love appearing in the mid-cinquecento, distinguished the two alienated states with the asseveration that “frenzy (*furia*) sometimes ceases, but insanity (*pazzia*) does so very rarely or never—this because madness is an inconstancy of a body in bad health, whereas frenzy is a sudden impetuosity toward all things without reason.”¹⁴ Other times, however, as already foretold by Ficino, the same word—usually the Latin *furor* or its Italian equivalents, but also sometimes *pazzia*—was applied to both states equally. Adopting this more typical approach to the subject was an anonymous author who sharply contrasted two different forms of “madness” (*pazzia*), the first, spelled with a small *p*, instigating much wretchedness and displeasure, and the second, spelled with a large *P*, generating much joy and pleasure. Whereas, this unnamed author maintained, the first of these alienated states lends itself to the regimens of the physicians, the second does not, having been instilled in the soul as a gift from God. “As Plato correctly judged,” he observed, “nothing can please the human life more, or give it greater delight, than the Madness (*Pazzia*) of the prophets and of the poets when, being agitated by this frenzy, they make such excellent verses that they are commonly held to be more divine than human.”¹⁵

¹³ Annibal Romei, *Dell'amore humano*, in *Discorsi* (Venice: Appresso Francesco Ziletti, 1585), p. 35.

¹⁴ Michelangelo Biondo, *Angoscia. La prima furia del mondo* (Venice: Per G. Antonio e Pietro Fratelli Nicolini da Sabio, 1542), fol. 11^r.

¹⁵ Anonymous, *La pazzia* (Venice: Per Giovanni Andrea Vavassore detto Guadagnino, 1543), sig. Eij^r. This tract is generally attributed to Vianesio Albergati (16th cent.), though it has also been ascribed to Ortensio Lando. Whoever the true author, his

As extensively spelled out in earlier chapters, the agitated psychic states characterized by Biondo above as “an inconstancy of a body in bad health” and by the anonymous author of *La pazzia* as an unwanted disturbance of the mind were generally assigned to the category of humoral melancholy by the medical writers. What complicates this matter is that the symptoms of melancholy seem to apply as readily to one as to the other of these forms of psychic alienation. Putting this diagnostic dilemma another way: the same melancholy that signals the infirm, bestial kind of enamored alienation condemned by Biondo and the anonymous author of *La pazzia* are equally able to signal the health-giving, divine form of alienation to which both writers gave their stamp of approval. It is self-evident that if the melancholy humor is to assume the uplifting powers it needs to accommodate the higher alienating functions connoted by writers like these, it first needs to be transformed from an inertly cold state into a dynamically enkindled one without going to the extreme of burning out. The later Renaissance exponents of the Ficinian genial theory, with the same “Aristotelian” references to back them up as Ficino, needed only to point out the inherently combustible nature of melancholy and offer a source of natural heat which could trigger its inflammation. In the case of the lover the obvious source of this heat is the incendiary sanguine humor, presumed to work its effects not only directly on the lover, but also indirectly by igniting the inflammable melancholy humor.

Among those voicing this theme in the post-Ficinian period was Giovanni Battista Manso (1561–1654), who pointed out that melancholy, if it were to serve as an effective invigorating catalyst of love in whatever mode it might appear, must be touched by the heat-giving choleric or sanguine humors, with the former triggering wrathful jealousy on the lover’s part, and the latter, “a pleasantness of the blood [which] assuages the sadness of melancholy.”¹⁶ Lending an astrological dimension to the same theme was the Florentine Carmelite Francesco Giuntini (1523–1590), who beheld one of its prototypical instances in Petrarca. Distraught lovers such as Petrarca, Giuntini noted in a commentary on a Petrarcan sonnet, “become pallid of

use of the phrase “*theatro della Pazzia*” earlier in his text, sig. Aij^o, also anticipates a further contribution to the *pazzia* literary genre by Tommaso Garzoni, treated below, pp. 364 ff.

¹⁶ Giovanni Battista Manso, *I paradossi ovvero dell’amore dialogi* (Milan: Girolamo Boirdoni Libraro, 1608), paradosso 2, p. 73.

countenance, lean, dry, and squalid, for which reason they are unable to find rest.” Such restless agitation, Giuntini declared, “is born from the melancholy blood,” which has the effect of so oppressing that lovers “are perpetually tormented and afflicted in both mind and soul.¹⁷ In his better known *Speculum astrologiae* Giuntini referred similar afflictions to the planet Saturn, which “renders us, in conjunction with a melancholy disposition (*ex melancholico signo*), sad, morose, and gloomy.”¹⁸ But Giuntini, following a line of thinking put forward by Ficino in his *De amore*, did not believe that the two versions of melancholy—one working its powers under the hegemony of Venus and the other under the hegemony of Saturn—contradicted one another. On the contrary, he thought of love melancholy as the result of Venus and Saturn jointly coming to bear on an afflicted lover like Petrarca.

Admittedly, Giuntini’s association of saturnine melancholy with a condition Petrarca himself had deemed a regrettable vice of his poetic profession did not in itself raise melancholy to the exalted level of Plato’s *furor amatorius*. With the medical literature to back him up, Giuntini, with Petrarca his exemplar, asserted that sufferers of love melancholy “are slow to anger, but once enraged, retain that anger for a long time, and are solitary, envious, proud, envious, proud, and admiring of themselves.” The same admired Petrarcan prototype, however, when evaluated against the backdrop of Ficino’s philosophically formulated theory of melancholy genius, instructed Giuntini that saturnines, in addition to exhibiting unwanted traits like the above, reveal themselves to be men “of profound thought and of the loftiest purposes.”¹⁹

The main object lesson extracted by Giuntini from Petrarca’s example, that is to say, did not turn, following a medical directive, on how to assuage the harshness of the melancholic afflictions commonly suffered by lovers. It rather turned, following a jointly Platonic-Aristotelian directive, on how to transform love melancholy, dubbed “heroic” even by the physicians, into a force spurring its sufferers

¹⁷ Francesco Giuntini, *Discorso sopra il tempo dello innamoramento del Petrarca*. . . . (Lyons: 1567), p. 22. On Giuntini’s astrological speculations, see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 129–33.

¹⁸ Giuntini, *Speculum astrologiae* . . . , 2 vols. (Lyons: In officina Q. Phil. Tinghi/Florence: apud Simphorianum Beraud, 1581), I, 575. First ed., pub. also at Lyons, is dated 1573.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

to reach beyond the ordinary limits of humanity. The lofty goal to which such melancholy can be put was cogently summarized, under the telling title *L'amata, overo della virtù heroica* (1591), by Gabriele Zinano (d. 1635). "Whereas the moral virtues consist of mediocrity," declared Zinano, "the heroic ones consist of excess, and whereas there is esteemed honor in moral virtues, in the heroic virtues is esteemed glory."²⁰ That by this pronouncement Zinano had in mind more than its terrestrial application is suggested in the further manifesto that the amorous heroic virtue "lifts that weight from the body which is appropriate to its natural state, and bursts all those bonds placed upon the intellect with which the body encloses it. . . ."²¹

Whereas the main trend of the writers so far encountered in this chapter has been to treat the Platonic love frenzy as the mainstay of their genial outlooks, with poetic frenzy a secondary affiliate, other writers—the subject of the next section—beheld in poetic and artistic expression the mainstay of their genial theory, with love frenzy acting as a secondary affiliate based on the supposition that love intrinsically aspires toward beauty. What ties all these writers together, despite divergent emphases, is their shared belief that the way to Heaven preached by the Reformation clerics can receive a constructive assist from nature. More particularly, differing emphases aside, they agreed that the divine frenzies issuing from Heaven perform their miracle-working powers in association with marvel-working powers latently present in the natural melancholy humor. If the quest for divinely illuminated truth was one leading motivator behind this conviction, another, as will now be the focus of our study, was the quest for divinely illuminated beauty.

B. *The Poetic and Artistic Testaments*

In his emblematic *Iconologia* (1593) Cesare Ripa (fl. 1600) presented two among his collection of ideographical figures which, when juxtaposed, might be taken as challenging the thesis given currency by the Florentine Platonic revival that melancholy genius is divine frenzy under another name. The first figure, a depiction of poetic frenzy

²⁰ Gabriele Zinano, *L'amata, overo della virtù heroica* (Reggio: Appresso Hercoliano Bartholi, [1591]), p. 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

(*furor poetico*), is pictured by Ripa as a young male of vivacious demeanor and ruddy complexion in the act of writing, posed with his face turned heavenward and out of whose head, crowned with laurel and surrounded by ivy, issues a set of wings."²² The second figure, a depiction of melancholy (*malinconia*), is pictured as a sorrowful old woman garbed in plain clothing and posed as pensively sitting on a rock with her elbows resting on her knees and her hands under her chin, at the side of whom stands a leafless tree set between two stones.²³ Surface appearances notwithstanding, however, Ripa's explications of the meanings behind these two variant personifications of genial alienation, one deriving from Plato and the other from pseudo-Aristotle, reveal homologous traits allowing for their coalescence along lines laid down a century earlier by Ficino.

In elucidation of the first figure, poetic frenzy, Ripa interpreted its wings to signify "the quickness and velocity of the poetic intellect, which, rather than sinking, sublimates itself, nobly bearing with it the fame of men which afterwards is preserved green and beautiful throughout many centuries, just as the foliage of the laurel and ivy similarly preserve themselves." The countenance of this winged figure, Ripa continued, "is lively and ruddy because the poetic frenzy is a superabundance of the vivacity of spirit which enriches the soul with numbers and with marvelous conceptions; inasmuch as it seems impossible that these have resulted only through a gift of nature, they are esteemed as special and singular gifts by the grace of Heaven." Only a divine origin of poetry, Ripa echoed Plato, can explain why poets "often form in their idea images of supernatural things, which in turn are written down by them on paper and afterwards, with great difficulty, reread, understood, and comprehended." Taking stock of this marvelous feature of poets, wrote Ripa, the ancients likened poets to inspired prophets, extolling them thereby as "saints born from Heaven, sons of Jupiter, interpreters of the Muses, and priests of Apollo."²⁴

²² Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*. . . (Padua: Per Pietro Paolo Tozzi, 1611; first ed., 1593), p. 191. On this work see Courtland D. Baker, "Certain Religious Elements in the English Doctrine of the Inspired Poet during the Renaissance," *English Literary History*, VI (1939), 300-23, with Ripa's depiction of poetic frenzy treated at p. 317, and Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, passim.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-92.

Here is a dynamically charged personification of the poetic frenzy that outwardly appears to have little in common with the depressed and lethargic personification assigned by Ripa to melancholy. The listless old woman representing the latter condition, rather, bears marked resemblance to a feminine figure appearing elsewhere in the text representative of phlegmatic-like *accidia*. Much as the effect of that old hag's affliction of torporous sloth is to render human beings "incapable of action" (*inhabile ad operare*),²⁵ so does this feminine personage appear to be subject to the same plight. Ripa's explication of melancholy's debilitating symptoms, however, setting them apart from those of *accidia*, suggests that not all is as hopeless for their sufferer as her image suggests. For whereas the depressed figure of Ripa's *accidiosa* shows no inclination to countermand her lethargy, the same cannot be said for the figure of his *malinconosa*, who, as Ripa understood through his familiarity with the Galenic medical and Aristotelian philosophical traditions, contains within herself a dynamic antidote to what is only a temporarily inert disposition on her part.

The symbol of lifeless stones in the emblem for melancholy, it would seem, offers no help in this regard, signifying, by Ripa's own admission, that "the melancholic is hard, and bereft of words and works, both through himself and through others, just as the stone does not produce grass nor allows the earth resting beneath it to do the same."²⁶ The accompanying image of the leafless tree, however, is another story, connoting, according to Ripa's further exegesis, that the debilitating state of the melancholy figure in its proximity is not a permanent one. "Melancholy causes those effects in men," Ripa explained, "which the force of winter causes in trees and plants, with these, on becoming agitated by diverse winds, tormented by the cold, and covered with snow, appearing to be dry, sterile, barren, and of very little worth."²⁷ Like the leaf-barren tree of winter, however, as Ripa pointed up the lesson of this symbol, the melancholic can look forward to becoming revived and sprouting lush fresh foliage in the spring.

While they are still in their depressed, winter-like state, as Ripa enlarged on the latter analogy, melancholics tend to be avoided by their fellow men. "There is no one who does not flee, as a thing

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 324–25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 323–24.

very displeasing, conversation with melancholy men,” wrote Ripa, “for they always go about with their thoughts upon difficult matters which they imagine to be present and real, revealing itself in signs of sorrow and of suffering.” But the temporary state of this barren condition, causing the melancholic to be of a solitary bent and “otiose in political activity,” is highlighted by Ripa’s further observation that “in the springtime, disclosed in the needs of sages, there are found melancholics who are experienced, exceedingly wise, and full of judgment.”²⁸ In this revived phase, we are to assume, the melancholic is no longer shunned and avoided by his fellows, but rather sought out and consulted for his sage counsel.

The obvious question raised by this juxtaposition of emblematic images in Ripa’s *Iconologia* is whether, in keeping with Ficino’s genial theory, the vigorous youth personifying poetic frenzy can credibly be associated with the lethargic female figure personifying melancholy? Or put in terms of the alternative philosophical traditions most directly impinging on this subject, Platonism and Aristotelianism, the question raised here is whether divine frenzy as extolled by Plato can tenably find in melancholy, commended by the Aristotelian *Problemata* as a mark of genius, a suitable natural auxiliary? The answer to that question, in keeping with the amalgamated theory of melancholy genius in vogue during Ripa’s time, was to draw a distinction between two phases of melancholy: a depressive cold phase and a manic enflamed phase, the latter of which could be associated with the kinds of vivacious characteristics attributed to Ripa’s *furor poetico*. Moreover, as Ripa’s pictorial approach to this subject suggests, a coalescence of the Platonic and Aristotelian genial theories could play into the thinking not only of poetic theorists of this period, but also of art theorists desirous of translating a theory of poetic melancholy into the visual language of the architects, sculptors, and painters.

The doctrine of poetic frenzy turned into a fad by the Florentine Platonic revival, as brought out in the previous chapter, was broadly countered by an alternative theory of invention also in popular fashion during this time, under the aesthetic guidelines of Horace, declaring poetry to be an act, not of superrational inspiration, but of rational artifice. Though some earlier members of the Horatian school, among

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

whom we have listed Landino, Parrasio and Luisini as examples,²⁹ attempted a conciliation between the Horatian and Platonic poetic theories, they were the exception rather than the rule. The major exponents of late Renaissance poetic criticism were more notable for dividing over the issue of divine frenzy than in seeking its conciliation with the rules of invention laid down by Horace.

The kind of technical expertise in the art of versification called for by the Horatians, according to the anti-Horatian Platonists, not only does not require genius in the true meaning of the word, but does not even require an especially virtuous moral disposition on the part of the poet through which his genius can be expressed. As both of these points were summarily made by one such Platonic critic, Giovanni Mario Verdizzotti (16th cent.), in his appropriately titled oration *Genius, sive de furore poetico*: "This holy frenzy, which some have declared to consist of divine wisdom, does not enter a wicked soul, nor is it appropriate for inducing poetizing among men of ordinary genius."³⁰ Modeling their notion of "holy frenzy" on the act of revealed prophecy, these Platonic critics opposed their view of divinely inspired poetizing to what they considered to be the mechanically fabricated mode of poetizing prescribed by the Horatians.

It was on the analogy of prophecy, for example, that one such disparager of Horatian rationalism, Antonio Minturno (d. 1574), in a treatise ostensibly based on Aristotle's *Poetics* but filtered through a Platonic sieve, proclaimed poetry at bottom to be, "not an art, but a divine power" (*ars nulla est, sed vis divina*).³¹ Or again on the analogy of prophecy, the Venetian academician Fabio Paolini (16th cent.), in a commentary on a line of Virgil's *Aeneid*, called on Democritus and Plato to testify "that no one can be a poet who is not seized by a certain spirit and frenzy, and that all their poems are completed and perfected, not through the endeavors of human genius alone, but by the impulse and instinct of a certain divine spirit which is wrested from the sacred breasts of the poets as though

²⁹ See above, pp. 116, 133-134, 236.

³⁰ Giovanni Mario Verdizzotti, *Genius, sive de furore poetico* (Venice: 1575), sig. A i.

³¹ Antonio Sebastiano Minturno, *De poeta . . . libri sex* (Venice: Apud Franciscum Rampazetum, 1559), lib. I, p. 67. As a bishop of the Church (Ugentino) active in the affairs of the Council of Trent, Minturno illustrates an foremost attempt of the late Renaissance to conciliate Platonic aesthetics with the theological imperatives of the Catholic reform movement. See, e.g., Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, p. 423.

it were arising from a cauldron and secret inner recess."³² Similarly basing his exalted opinion of poetry on a presumed inner kinship with prophecy was Giovanni Antonio Viperano (d. 1610), who declared that, being possessed by a power which carries them beyond themselves, poets and prophets alike are often judged to be insane by those ignorant of the sublime source of their alienation. To those endowed with a clearer understanding of their outwardly eccentric ways, however, attested Viperano, poets and prophets "are not insane, but divine," instructing us thereby that "rather than despising the divine frenzy, we ought vehemently to admire it."³³

If the Platonic critics beheld in the act of prophetic insight one of their more conspicuous contradictions to the poetic rules of Horace, they beheld another in the act of a love that knows no bounds. An example is furnished in a dialogue addressed to this subject by the adopted Florentine Scipione Ammirato (1531–1600). Asked why "poets know nothing of what they speak and yet are full of learning and wisdom?," Ammirato's spokesman replies that knowledge is obtained in two ways, "the first through artifice, and the second through frenzy." It is the addition of this second factor in the poetic act, insisted Ammirato in a typical retort against the Horatian school, that distinguishes genuinely inspired poems from artificially contrived verses. Being familiar with Ficino's *De amore*, the author of which is cited at the outset of his dialogue, Ammirato saw a comparison between the latter form of frenzied poetry and frenzied love, "which so overflows within us that it causes us to run to the love of another." When such love is directed upward rather than outward, Ammirato's protagonist further speculates, the comparison is turned into one of mystical rapture and prophetic revelation, "so that, while some prophesy through virtue of [outward] signs and of the stars, others do so without being able to allege any cause other than an inner movement of their souls which impels them. And we see the same thing in the mystical trance."³⁴

³² Fabio Paolini, *Hebdomades, sive septem de septenario libri* (Venice: Apud Franciscum Franciscium Senensem, 1589), proem., p. 1. On Paolini see Walker, *Magic*, pp. 126 ff. According to Walker, Paolini founded the short-lived Accademia degli Uranici, and on its demise joined with other scholars in the founding of the Seconda Accademia Veneziana.

³³ Giovanni Antonio Viperano, *De poetica libri tres* (Antwerp: Ex officina Christophori Plantini, 1579), cap. 3, pp. 16–7.

³⁴ Scipione Ammirato, *Il Dedalione ovvero dell poeta dialogo*, in Weinberg, *Trattati*, II, 480. On Ammirato's Platonic poetic precepts see Weinberg, *History of Literary Criticism*,

A view of poetic creativity like those recounted above hinges on a fundamental distinction on the part of its proponents between conventional rules of poetic expression that are transmittable from teachers to students and poetic genius that, superceding all human conventions, is transmittable only by God. Drawing on a familiar Platonic image to reinforce this distinction, Ammirato had his spokesman exclaim: "By frenzy I mean those of us who, having had planted within themselves certain seeds (*certi semi*) that quickly germinate according to their nature, are apt for learning some things better than others." Whereas the Platonic critics in Ammirato's mold judged knowledge pertaining to the first kind of poetizing to be necessarily external and representational, they judged the knowledge pertaining to the second and higher kind of poetizing to be internal and intuitional. As Ammirato's protagonist summarizes this distinction: "And since this form of knowing which resides within us is not the ordinary one, nor is it acquired in the ways through which other things are learned, it is said to be by frenzy which, being without a means of representing things in our minds, causes us to know and to possess our object immediately."³⁵

Likewise basing his poetic theory on a preference for unlabored and uncontrived forms of expression over labored and contrived ones was the native Florentine Agnolo Segni (fl. 1576), who, in making his point, sharply refuted the supposition of Castelvetro that Plato intended the frenzy doctrine as a joke. On the contrary, insisted Segni, Plato was deadly serious when he expounded the theory of divine frenzy, his name for the divine spirit (*il divino spirito*) which descends to the poet from above and, through him, acts as the efficient cause (*causa efficiente*) of his poetic operations.³⁶ The reasoning applied to this subject by Segni followed the law of sufficient cause. For a poem to be truly worthy of that name, Segni speculated,

I, 277 ff., with focus upon the divine frenzy theory at pp. 278–79. For Ammirato's better known historical preoccupations see Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527–1800* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), "bibliographical note," pp. 521–22. Ammirato was commissioned by Cosimo I to write a history of Florence after he moved there from Naples.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Agnolo Segni, *Lezioni intorno alla poesia*, in Weinberg, *Trattati*, III, p. 63. Weinberg lists the date of this work as 1573. Cf. Segni's *Ragionamento . . . sopra le cose pertinenti alla poetica* (Florence: Nella stamperia di Giorgio Marescotti, 1581), esp. lezz. III: "Sopra la purgazione, che opera la poesia," pp. 40 ff., incorporating many passages intact from the earlier work. On Segni's Platonic poetics see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 300–304.

it clothes an ideal and perfect form that must be referred beyond a human to a divine origin. Plato, Segni proffered, gave the name of poetic frenzy to the invisible spirit which, passing from God to the poet, is able to penetrate the visible material layers of things to the invisible forms lying beneath them.

Much like the earlier critic Fuscano, Segni determined that poetry, by virtue of being produced in response to a divine impulse, occupies a higher status than the arts and sciences not so blessed. "Poetry," Segni stated, "is different from all the other operations of man." Why is this so? All other human operations, Segni answered, are performed through a combination of the native natural abilities of the artisan and the study and industry subsequently undergone by the artisan for the purpose of cultivating his natural abilities. Poetry, however, is unique in owing its origin to a power transcending both native ability and industry. More precisely: "Its origin, in truth, is not human, but divine. It is inspiration, it is the spirit of God which fills the minds of some people, moves them to poetize, and makes their poetry a marvelous and divine creation."³⁷

What "virtue" (*la virtù*) is to the other arts, Segni continued, divine frenzy is to poetry. To underscore this postulate Segni resorted to certain observable analogies. "Just as courageous and just works, if deprived of courage and justice, are turned into very imperfect and bad works," he noted, "so is that poem not a good one, but rather a bad one, which is accomplished by a man without divine inspiration." Or for another parallel: "Just as one deprived of knowledge (*scienza*) cannot pleasurably contemplate and reason about the nature of things, and moreover cannot help from provoking disgust in those who listen to him, likewise the poet deprived of guidance by the divine frenzy easily errs, does not know what to say, experiences much fatigue, and visits anguish and annoyance upon others." A third analogy, moreover, sets up comparison between poetry and painting. "Just as painting produced by one who does not possess the talent is distorted and ugly," observed Segni, "a poem composed without the divine frenzy is unable to be seen or to be read with pleasure because it does not contain anything of beauty within itself."³⁸

In the light of these analogies Segni judged that, "whereas in other

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63. On Fuscano's anticipation of Segni in this regard see above, pp. 134–35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

operations a virtuous habit makes the work perfect, in poetry it is the divine spirit which endows the poem with all its goodness, all its beauty, and all its praiseworthy attributes." This being the case, "poetry, without this divine spirit, is not truly poetry, nor the poet a poet, just as without virtue there is no worldly happiness, nor can any operation be termed felicitous, inasmuch as virtue is essential to felicity." Just as "virtue," the equivalent of learned industry, is essential to the felicitous execution of the other arts, so, Segni reasoned, is the divine frenzy essential to the execution of genuine poetry. For deprived of divine frenzy, Segni averred, "there is no poem, but there will only be something that approximates a poem." In poetry as in worldly happiness (*la felicità*) the goal is perfection, "and the essence of that perfection consists in its highest form." Such perfection "is not accomplished in happiness without virtue, nor in poetry without frenzy."³⁹

As this exposition of poetic inspiration indicates, Segni expressly foreclosed the temptation to extend its bounds to embrace the visual arts. So far as he brought the art of painting to bear on his discussion, it was with the intent, not of extending the powers of divine frenzy to painters, but rather of underscoring a presumed dependency of the painter's art on what he terms *la virtù*, that is, learned human ability. Yet even as Segni distinguished poetry from the visual arts, he also pointed the way to how others of his age might go beyond his restricted concept of poetic creation. The intermediary step that would make this possible, with a harmony-inducing divine frenzy constituting the nexus of their union, was Segni's identification of poetry with music. "Just as the frenzy of love accords with the beauty of God, stirring one to its contemplation, and the frenzy of prophets accords with the virtue which foretells and admonishes," as Segni turned the Platonic inspiration theory to his aesthetic ideals, "so does the frenzy of poets accord with the symmetry and proportion and divine harmony of which all things are filled."⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64. Though citing Proclus (412–1485) as his source here, Segni undoubtedly had access to his ideas through Ficino's translations of the ancient Neoplatonists, as in, e.g., the Aldine eds. of 1503 and 1516. On the post-Ficinian vogue of the music-poetry linkage see esp. Palisca, *Musical Thought*, ch. 13, pp. 369 ff., with special attention given to Segni's oration at pp. 400–401. For further instances of the poetry-music linkage, with reliance on a hermeneutic paradigm laid down by Michel Foucault, see Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic*, ch. 6: "An Archaeology of Poetic Furor, 1500–1650," pp. 189 ff.

This insight explained for Segni why verse properly belongs to the art of poetry and prose does not, for “verse is nothing else but symmetry and meter and proportion and harmony.”⁴¹ But also meeting the demands of this criterion for poetic frenzy, as Segni went on to establish, is the art of music, which, in essence, is one with poetry. “Poetry, I say,” Segni declared, “is music and harmony,” his reasoning being that musical harmony is acquired “not merely through the harmony of voices and of sounds, nor through that of verses inherently endowed with much harmony, but through the consonance and union of all these parts together: of human customs and life, of discourse, of song, and of dance.”⁴² Putting the same idea in terms of the Platonic inspiration theory: “Deprived of harmony, the poem is nothing, and deprived of frenzy it has no harmony.” For this reason, Segni theorized, true poetry proceeds not merely from human artifice, “but from that divine grace termed ‘frenzy’ (*furore*) by the Greeks, because it ravishes the mind of the poet, raises it above himself, and fills it with divine harmony, which it expresses and makes manifest in verses and in composition.”⁴³ Segni’s view of poetry as here indicated perfectly accords with that of his contemporary Sebastiano Erizzo (16th cent.), who, with the divinely frenzied Petrarca his model, proclaimed that “men were created musicians and poets by nature” (*gli huomini Musici, & Poeti furono dalla natura creati*).⁴⁴

The foregoing Platonically inspired explications of the poetic act, while not explicitly rejecting the corresponding theory of melancholy genius attributed by popular acclaim to Aristotle, nevertheless appear to operate independently of that more earth-based humoral explication. Others of their way of thinking, however, showed no such reluctance to take this additional step. What sets off these expositions of the Platonic frenzy theory from the previous examples, as we will now demonstrate, is that they did not stop with efficient causes from above. They also addressed the need for material causes from below. To the Platonic supernaturalist theory of poetic genius they conjoined the Aristotelian naturalist theory, which more faithfully reflected the full dimensions of the Ficinian legacy with its subordination of Aristotelian to Platonic principles.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, lez. V, p. 73.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁴ Sebastiano Erizzo, *Espositione . . . nelle tre canzoni di M. Francesco Petrarca chiamate le tre forelle. Nuovamente mandate in luce da M. Lodovico Dolce* (Venice: Appress Andrea Arrivabene, 1561), canz. I, fol. 2^r.

* * *

In a chapter of his *Ars poetica* addressed to poetic frenzy the Siense Jesuit Alessandro Donati (1584–1640), with Ficino his guide, drew the usual Platonic distinction between one form of frenzy “from human diseases” (*ab humanis morbis*) and another form “from a divine alienation” (*ab alienatione divina*). Also following Ficino, Donati declared natural melancholy to be as readily adaptable to the second as to the first of these forms of alienation—on the proviso, of course, that it is inflamed to the right degree. “As Aristotle instructs us,” observed Donati with this idea in mind, “the poetic frenzy is a certain effervescent inflammation of the interior faculties and of the mind by melancholy, by means of which the genius is stirred up and moved to pour forth with poetic songs and harmonies.”⁴⁵ Donati’s significance for our purposes thus reveals itself to be three-pronged. First, he illustrates an amalgamation of the Platonic frenzy theory of genius with the Aristotelian theory of melancholy genius; second, he illustrates the potential assimilation of that amalgamation by the religious reform movement; and third, he illustrates the continued appeal of the doctrine of inspired melancholy genius well into the seicento.

A working poet in rapport with the trend to lend the Platonic frenzies a natural assistance was Bernardo Tasso (1494–1569), the father of the more famous Torquato, who outlined the theory guiding his craft in his *Ragionamento della poesia* (1562). With the mystical and prophetic comparisons dear to the Platonists to inform his aesthetic vision, Bernardo, in a nearly verbatim recapitulation of Ficino’s inspiration doctrine as spelled out in his *De amore*, declared poetic frenzy to be “nothing else but an illumination of the rational soul by which, after it has descended to this low and earthly state from one which is lofty and divine, God recalls and raises it to heavenly things.”⁴⁶ For Bernardo, however, the Platonic inspiration doctrine constituted but one component of an elevated poetic power, with another component, grounded in nature rather than supernature, consisting of a moderately inflamed melancholy humor.

⁴⁵ Alessandro Donati da Siena, *Ars poetica libri tres* (Rome: Guilielmi Fattiotti, 1631), lib. I, cap. 20: “Quid sit furor poeticus?,” pp. 49 ff.

⁴⁶ Bernardo Tasso, *Ragionamento della poesia*, in Weinberg, ed. *Trattati*, II, 581. Cf. above, pp. 91–92. This discourse, delivered before the Accademia Veneziana in 1560 and pub. two years later, is also found in Tasso, *Delle lettere*, 2 vols. (Padua: Giuseppe Comino, 1733), II, 511 ff. On the poetic theory contained therein see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 282–84. As a poet Bernardo is best known for his *Amadigi*, an Italian-language reworking of the medieval Spanish poem relating the exploits of Amadis of Gaul.

In the process of developing his theory of poetic genius Bernardo, in the expected Platonic manner, distinguished between two kinds of alienation, "one caused by some infirmity," as he put it, "and the other by the grace of God." By virtue of the first of these alienations, contended Bernardo, "a man becomes, in a certain manner, an animal," whereas by virtue of the second, "he raises himself above the state of human nature and passes into a god." For the elder Tasso, however, this did not mean that natural melancholy was to be found only in the first, animal form of frenzy. It is also present, he insisted with the "Aristotelian" example of the obscure poet Maracus of Syracuse to back him up, in the second, divine form of frenzy which, so he held, is extorted by a higher spiritual power from "the sacred breasts of the poets."⁴⁷ And what distinguishes this form of melancholy from its animal look-alike? The answer for Bernardo, following Ficino, lay in pseudo-Aristotle's claim that melancholy, being of an inherently combustible nature, is capable of becoming transformed from a debilitating drag on the soul into an energizing power capable of liberating the soul of its corporeal bonds.

For Bernardo's son Torquato Tasso (1544–1599), the "poet of heroes," the marked presence of melancholy in poets of genius put them in the same lofty ranks as the boldly spirited paragons of virtue which he had made the subject of his own poetic excursions. "Not only philosophers and poets are plagued by this vice," Torquato declared, "but also heroes."⁴⁸ Poets represented for Torquato, as it were, melancholy "heroes of the mind" on the model of the downcast heroes Ajax, Hercules, and Bellerophon depicted in the Aristotelian *Problemata*. As for some of the more notable ancient poets to fall prey to this "heroic" affliction, the younger Torquato made special mention of Lucretius, who "killed himself out of melancholy," and Democritus, who "chased from Parnassus those poets who are healthy."⁴⁹

The sublime stature of poetry was confirmed for the second Tasso by the act of cosmic creation itself, envisaged by him as a kind of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Torquato Tasso, *Il messaggero*, in *Dialoghi*, ed. Ezio Raimondi, 2 vols. (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1958), II, 909. As epic poet Tasso is best remembered for his *Gerusalemme liberata*, completed in 1575, pub. in 1581, and revised and reissued as *Gerusalemme conquistata* in 1593. For the poetic theory undergirding Tasso's epic poems see Williams, *Art*, pp. 150 ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 266.

primal heroic-poetic act. "It is no wonder that poetry is natural in human minds," as Torquato's spokesman makes this point in a dialogue about the nature of the arts, "inasmuch as God Himself, by whom our minds were created, is a poet, and the divine art with which He created the world was, so to speak, the art of poetry."⁵⁰ In one key regard, however, Torquato's version of human creativity fails to conform to its divine paradigm. For whereas, he reasoned, the divine Creator is free of conditioning by the exigencies of nature that came into being with the creative act, including the exigencies imposed on the human mind by the bodily humors, the same cannot be said for the Creator's human emulators. The characteristic melancholy of these, Torquato postulated, springs from a frustrated desire to traverse the gulf separating their finite realm of creativity from the infinitely removed one occupied by their divine prototype.

In addition to pointing up the need for a natural component to the poetic-heroic drive of human genius, the younger Tasso also clues us as to how poetic theory might be translated into visual art theory, with the alienated artist now to be viewed as depicting on a wall, on canvas, or in stone the same inspired forms of the mind which the poet depicts in words. It was with with a view of an inner kinship between poetic and visual expression, for example, that Giovanni Pietro Capriano (fl. 1550), in his *Della vera poetica*, listed among the arts worthy of being called noble "poetry, painting, statuary, and all the other arts descending from their number through which we imitate things."⁵¹ Speaking more specifically to the subject of poetry among these, the focus of his tract, Capriano followed the expected Platonic line by attributing its loftiness to an inspiration from above, that is, to "a frenzy which is not insane but sublime and sacred; this, as Plato agrees, is born from the fervid and elevated consideration of things."⁵² The obvious inference to be drawn from Capriano's explanation for poetry's nobility, its infusion by the divine frenzy, is that it equally applies to the visually imitative arts in poetry's sublime company.

⁵⁰ Tasso, *Il Ficinò overo de l'amore*, in *Dialoghi*, II, 909.

⁵¹ Giovanni Pietro Capriano, *Della vera poetica libro I*, cap. I, in Weinberg, *Trattati*, II, 295. This work (Venice: Appresso Bolognino Zaltieri, 1555) is also found in facsimile in Bernhard Fabian, ed. *Poetiken des Cinquecento* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1968), Vol. 12. On Capriano's poetic theory see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, II, 737.

⁵² *Ibid.*, cap. 2, p. 308.

As in the disagreements over the origin and nature of poetic invention during this period, two questions often pushed themselves to the fore in writings of late Renaissance art theorists. The first question is whether visual art, on the analogy of poetry, is at heart a human contrivance subject to established rules of decorum in the Horatian mode or, contrarily, owes its origin to a higher divine impulse—that is, to the poetic frenzy—in the Platonic version. And the second question, on that same analogy, is whether artistic genius, once it is granted to be divinely instilled and enkindled, also requires the participation of natural melancholy in accordance with the Aristotelian version of poetic instigation.

Significantly, the high point of this debate among theorists of the visual arts, as that among their counterparts of the literary arts, coincided with the ever greater religious demands imposed on them by the Catholic reform movement. Mindful of the ancient maxim that “as poetry is to the learned, so is painting to the unlearned” (*littera doctibus, pictura idiotibus*), the Platonically disposed theorists of the arts proclaimed the licit vocation of painters, sculptors, and architects to be, after becoming properly infused and informed by supersensual effusions from above, one of expressing in visual images the sacred dogmas of Catholic orthodoxy. As the customary Reformation rationale behind this higher purpose of the arts, codified at the Council of Trent, was put by one such theorist, the Jesuit Antonio Possevino (1534–1611), “good poets and good painters are said to be miracles of nature, who are rather born than made.”⁵³ In this way the Catholic reform movement not only opened a door to those theorists of the visual arts favoring the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy over the opposing Horatian doctrine of poetic artifice. It also, under the impact of the Ficinian mode for expressing the powers of divine inspiration, opened a door to those art theorists who would have us believe that the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius legitimately complements the Platonic frenzy doctrine by furnishing it with an appropriate material cause.

⁵³ Antonio Possevino, *De ratione studiorum, ad disciplinas & ad salutem omnium gentium procurandam* (Cologne: Apud Joannem Gymnicum sub Monocente, 1607), lib. XVII, cap. 33, p. 470.

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“Just as cutting away, O Lady, makes/In stone craggy and rough/A figure come to life, . . ./This from my outer shell/You only can release;/In me there is no will nor force.” With words like these, incorporated into a sonnet, Michelangelo likened the release of his soul from the encumbrances of its earthly encrustations at the behest of his “Lady” to the release of a form hidden in a block of model by a sculptor’s chisel. With a combination of traditional stilnovist themes, Ficino’s revised doctrine of love frenzy, and an ancient meditation on a sculptural figure by Callistratus to guide him, Michelangelo illustrated an important direction taken by the later Renaissance Platonic movement that linked the arts of man in a shared enterprise. Beyond merely appealing to our sense of beauty, Michelangelo believed, the arts are teleologically invested by God with the aim, abetted by the divine frenzy, of releasing the immortal soul from its mortal shell.⁵⁴

As perceived by Michelangelo, likewise brought out in his sonnets, the ideal forms brought to light by the artist correspond to forms primordially implanted by God in the artist’s mind. As put in another of his sonnets: “Nothing is in the finest artist’s head/That is not held inside a single stone/With surplus, but to this a hand may come/Only where the intelligence has led.”⁵⁵ Responding to this notion of Michelangelo in a 1541 oration, Benedetto Varchi declared the immaterial images (*immaginazioni immateriali*) residing in the mind of the artist to be “far more perfect than are those artificial forms which are material.”⁵⁶ What Varchi failed to add to his ennobled

⁵⁴ Michelangelo, sonnets, cited in Holt, *Documentary History of Art*, II, 21. For the Callistratus precedent see above, p. 78, and on Michelangelo’s youthful relations to Ficino’s Florentine circle, p. 119.

⁵⁵ Michelangelo, sonnets, in Holt, *Documentary History*, p. 21. Thus, according to Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 73: “For Michelangelo the essential characteristic of sculpture is that the artist starts with a block of stone or marble and cuts away from it till he reveals or discovers the statue in it. This statue is the material equivalent of the idea which the artist had in his own mind; and, since the statue existed potentially in the block before the artist began to work on it, it is in a sense true to say that the idea in the artist’s mind also existed potentially in the block, and that all he has done in carving his statue is to discover his idea.”

⁵⁶ Varchi, *Sopra la pittura e scultura lezione due* in *Opere*, II, 613. According to Williams, *Art*, p. 36, Varchi, basing his analysis of art on Aristotelian rather than Platonic principles, “is quite adamant that the artist makes no use of Platonic ideas.” This position is hard to reconcile, however, with other writings by Varchi summarized

view of the arts, however, paralleling his treatment of the love theme earlier cited, is a call for the natural assistance of melancholy to expedite the liberating function of the artist. Other contributors to art theory during this time, however, were not so reticent about this need, among whom stand out the names of Federigo Zuccaro and Romano Alberti at Rome and Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo at Milan.

That which Michelangelo characterized as a preexisting idea of the artist, and Varchi as an “immaterial image” imprinted on the artist’s mind, the prime mover and first president of the Roman Academy of Drawing, Federigo Zuccaro (1543–1609), characterized in his 1593 inaugural address before that body as a preexisting “internal design” (*disegno interno*) to guide the artist’s creative activity. This *disegno interno*, Zuccaro insisted, “is not material, nor of the body,” adding that, “it is not an accident of any substance, but is form, idea, order, rule, and object of the intellect, in which are expressed those things which have been intended, both divine and human.”⁵⁷ Expressly backing his elevated view of the arts by Plato, Zuccaro further proclaimed the design impressed on the artist’s mind to be illuminated “not by a natural light, but by a light which is supernatural and of a divine derivation.”⁵⁸

Following the aesthetic theory presented by Zuccaro to his Roman audience, that is to say, the vocation of the artist is essentially akin to that of the religious mystic; by imagining and depicting “those things which are invisible,” he counseled in this regard, the painter as surely as the mystic “will be assisted in ascending to the contemplation of divine things.”⁵⁹ Identifying the *disegno interno* of the artist with what the mystics term “the burning spark of divinity that resides within us” (*scintilla ardente della divinità in noi*),⁶⁰ Zuccaro declared it

by Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 114–17, revealing marked Platonic leanings on his part. For a contrasting Platonic interpretation of Varchi’s exposition of the Michelangelo sonnet see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 100n, underscoring its parallel with a corresponding concept of artistic *concelto* contemporaneously being worked out by Michelangelo’s admiring biographer Vasari.

⁵⁷ Frederico Zuccaro, *L’idea de’ pittori, scultori et architetti . . . divisa in due libri* (Torino: Agostino Disserolio, 1607), lib. I, cap. 3, p. 5. Passage also found in Barocchi, *Scritti d’Arte*, I, 1066. On Zuccaro see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, pp. 137 ff.; Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, pp. 233–34; and Williams, *Art*, pp. 135–50, the latter pointing out, pp. 135–36, that Zuccaro not only inherited the concept of artistic *disegno* from Vasari (treated in ch. 1, pp. 29 ff.), but also the project, following Vasari’s death in 1574, of decorating Brunelleschi’s cupola covering the Florentine cathedral.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. I, cap. 14, p. 43.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 6, p. 32 (Barocchi, I, 1046).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 15, p. 75 (Barocchi, II, 2108).

to be capable, by virtue of inspiring literary and artistic genius alike through its expression as poetic frenzy, to be also capable of inspiring the mind of the visual artist with color, harmony, and proportion.

In this manner Zuccaro upheld a mimetic function for art in formal accordance with Aristotelian aesthetic principles while at the same time redefining that function to fit a Platonic idealist mode of thought. The mimetic objective of the artist, Zuccaro maintained, calls, not for the imitation of external nature, but rather for the imitation of divine ideas residing in the artist's mind. But whereas conventional mimetic theory lent itself to a regulative and formalistic approach to art, reflected, as brought out in the previous chapter, in art theorists like Pino and Armenini, Zuccaro's internalized notion of mimesis resisted being circumscribed by finite rules.

The proof of the ultimately divine origin of art, Zuccaro observed, lies in its ability to refract in its external effects something of the infinite nature of its cause—effects thereby made responsive to divine inspiration but not to the confining strictures of human convention. Drawing a distinction between “three qualities and three species of *disegno*, namely, natural, artificial, and phantastic,” Zuccaro assigned the last of these, when brought under the force of the divine frenzy, to the highest rank of artistic expression. Concerning this most exalted type of creative urge, he averred, “because it is capricious and eccentric, one cannot assign to it a particular rule” (*per esser capricci, e bizzarrie, no si può dar regola particolare*).⁶¹

In keeping with the Ficinian inspiration theory of aesthetic creativity, moreover, Zuccaro endeavored to reconcile Plato's supernaturalist explanation of genial expression with the Aristotelian naturalist explanation centering on the melancholy humor and the astrological explanation centering on planetary Saturn. Corresponding to the traits of “withdrawn, melancholic, and solitary Saturn” to which they are subject, according to Zuccaro, melancholy artists are superior to the general run of men as Saturn “is superior to all the other planets.” For Saturn, explained Zuccaro, being the planet nearest to the fixed stars at the threshold of the heavenly Empyrean, is the seat of the blessed and grants to them its superior position.” In the light of these considerations Zuccaro declared the visual arts to compare favorably with, and serve as fit instruments of, “sacred theology, which understands and discourses over the essence and quality

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 4, p. 20. For the contrasting theories of Pino and Armenini, see above, pp. 240 ff.

of God, over the most holy Trinity, and over the most holy sacraments of the Church.”⁶² The effect of Zuccaro’s words on this subject was to further a dual harmonization: first, a harmonization of the drive for artistic creativity with the theological demands of Catholic orthodoxy as redefined at the Council of Trent, and second, a harmonization of the Platonic and Aristotelian genial theories in service to the religious program of the Catholic reform movement. In both of these capacities Zuccaro envisaged the artist as a kind of visual poet instigated directly by God through the divine frenzy and indirectly through the mediation of Saturn and of the melancholy humor under Saturn’s influence. Through these concurrent means, the first supernatural and the second natural, Zuccaro cleared the way for theologizing the arts in the Ficinian mode.

In Zuccaro’s audience at the Roman Academy of Drawing, and subsequently incorporating many of the speaker’s ideas into his own speculations on the nature of artistic creativity, was Romano Alberti (fl. 1585). Picking up on an observation made a century earlier by his namesake, Leon Battista, Romano called on the ancient sage Hermes Trismegistus to testify, in a tract upholding painting’s *nobiltà*, that “painting was born together with religion.”⁶³ If, Alberti proffered, one sign of painting’s nobility lies in its kinship with the arts of poetry and rhetoric, and another in its kinship with speculative philosophy, still a higher sign of its nobility lies in its kinship with that branch of learning “called theological or spiritual, since it belongs to the Church which measures things according to the Christian discipline.”⁶⁴ In this higher spiritual capacity, affirmed Alberti, painting has much the same kind of effect on the soul as do the literary and mathematical arts likewise in service to theology; “painting,” testified

⁶² *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 15, pp. 76, 78 (Barocchi, II, 2109, 2111).

⁶³ Romano Alberti, *Trattato della nobiltà della pittura* (Rome: Per Francesco Zannetti, 1585), cap. 2, p. 47. For Leon Battista Alberti’s corresponding reference to this Hermetic notion, which also extended it to sculpture, see above, p. 63. The Council of Trent had recently endowed this Hermetic insight with Christian validation, confirming the second Alberti’s belief that painting is as fully an ancillary of theology as the customary seven liberal arts and warrants being placed among those arts as an eighth member. Concerning Alberti’s dependence on Zuccaro, his *Origine e progresso dell’academia del disegno* (1604), as pointed out by Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 139, “nominally contains the minutes of Academy discussion for the years 1593–4, but since no one but Federico Zuccaro seems to have been allowed to speak, the book is simply a sort of preliminary to the *Idea*.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, cap. 1, p. 12; cap. 2, p. 38.

Alberti, “teaches the intellect, moves the will, and refreshes the memory concerning divine things.”⁶⁵

If Alberti’s view of what it takes to produce artistic genius reveals marked resemblance to that of his teacher Zuccaro, this resemblance is further confirmed by his additional postulate that the ideas informing painting are gleaned with the assistance both of the divine frenzy and of natural melancholy in its service. Understandably Alberti’s rationale for artistic melancholy, like Zuccaro’s, closely followed Ficino’s explanations for mystical, prophetic, poetic and love melancholy. In accordance with these disciplinary parallels Alberti maintained that “painters become melancholics because, in desiring to imitate, it is necessary for them to retain their phantasms fixed in the intellect.” Thus, Alberti exhorted, being as prone as poets and philosophers to hold their minds “abstracted and separated from matter, from which melancholy consequently results,” painters are as fully deserving as poets and philosophers of being included in the rare group designated by Aristotle when he declared that “almost all exceptionally intelligent and prudent men have been melancholics.”⁶⁶

Further professing a belief in the essential compatibility between a synthesized Platonic-Aristotelian genial theory and the demands of religious reform was the Milanese art theorist Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1600), who, apparently in response to currents of iconoclasm flowing into Italy from the Protestant north, fervidly proclaimed on behalf of the arts that “this very holy use of sacred images has been approved and confirmed by all the sacred councils legitimately congregated in the name of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷ While deeming the creative impulse behind the composition of such sacred images “a divine gift,”⁶⁸ Lomazzo at the same time formally discouraged eccentricity or capriciousness in the artist, instead subjecting individual peculiarities

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 2, p. 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 1, p. 17. Passage also found in Barocchi, *Scritti*, I, 1472, quoted in Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 361n., and rendered into English in Wittkower, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 105.

⁶⁷ Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scultura, ed architettura*. . . ., 3 vols. (Rome: Presso Saverio Del-Monte, 1844), I, proem., p. 6. For orig. text on which this mod. ed. is based see *Trattato dell'arte de la pittura*. . . . (Milan: Appresso Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1584). Excerpt also found in Barocchi, *Trattati*, I, 348–63. Lomazzo turned to art theory after going blind in 1571. On Lomazzo’s aesthetic precepts see Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, 138 ff.; Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, pp. 118–20; and Williams, *Art*, pp. 135 ff.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. II, cap. 2, p. 179.

to the discipline of academic rules. At the same time, however, his inspiration theory of the arts directed the artist and his viewer alike beyond the limits of the material world in a way that could just as easily be interpreted as contravening a strict interpretation of his academic regulations. Endorsing, with Alberti, the Hermetic maxim declaring painting to be born together with religion, Lomazzo thereby commended the inclusion of painting among the liberal arts in their divinely sanctioned roles as handmaidens of theology.⁶⁹

Whereas, as noted above, Zuccaro indicated a preference for the static image of a divinely instilled *disegno interno* to organize the creative expression of the artist, Lomazzo's preference was for the more dynamic and fluid image of music, in his mind a common denominator of prophecy, poetry, and painting alike. Concerning the first of these alienated categories, Lomazzo noted that Apollo, the reputed inspirer of prophets, was "a skilled musician and lutanist," the dual skills of which can be explained by the fact that music and prophecy draw on a shared source of "spiritual energies" (*spirituali energie*) residing in a realm existing beyond this natural one.⁷⁰ Concerning the second category in turn, with "the great Ficino" his express authority, Lomazzo declared to be tapped into the same stream of divine energy infusing the visions of prophets the imaginative powers of the poets, that is, "the priests of the Muses, who are investigators of the truth and of the highest good."⁷¹ Finally, concerning the third category of alienation, Lomazzo maintained that painters, who express in visual form the sacred images which poets and musicians express in the form of words and sound, are nourished by the same invigorative spiritual radiations. In the third as in the preceding two kindred cases Lomazzo found jointly applicable the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy and the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius.

Coming to us from a place existing above our own paltry one, declared Lomazzo, the divine frenzy "elevates our minds to a place above human nature (*sopra la natura humana*), and transforms it, as it

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Lomazzo, *Idea del tempio della pittura* (Milan: Appresso Paolo Gollardo Pontio, 1590), cap. 6, pp. 23, 25. On Lomazzo's attempt to encourage rationality in artists to counter their widespread reputation for irrationality and eccentricity, see Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn*, p. 92, and Blunt, *Artistic Theory*, p. 148: "Rules are for him [viz., Lomazzo] 'the unchangeable foundations of the art.'"

⁷⁰ Lomazzo, *Della forma delle muse. . .* (Milan: Per Paolo Gottardo Pontio, [1591]), pp. 14, 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

were, into God."⁷² To the extent that this principle can be applied to prophets and poets, he continued, it can equally be applied to the poets of the visual arts, the painters. "Just as it is necessary for the poet to possess, in combination with the excellence of his genius, a certain desire and inclination of the will which the ancients called the frenzy of Apollo and of the Muses, wherefore he is moved to poetize," he noted in this regard, "so does it happen that, together with the other traits which are required for his success, the painter possesses the knowledge and strength to express the principal movements as though they were instilled within himself."⁷³ Thus, Lomazzo judged, there is produced in the soul of the painter as surely as in the souls of prophets and poets "rapture of the soul, and its conversion into the Deity of the Muses."⁷⁴

For Lomazzo as for Ficino before him, moreover, the invocation of a theory referring genius to a divine impulse did not exclude natural assistance in the form of a moderately enkindled melancholy humor. In speaking of the saturnine condition, it is true, Lomazzo associated melancholy with pictorial images of a type more likely to invoke dejection and sorrow than exhilaration and exuberance in their viewers. Examples are images of "our first parents Adam and Eve, after they had committed the sin of disobedience," or again of Agar in her melancholy solitude "when, heavy with Ishmael, she was chased away by the wife of Abraham," or still again of Peter after he denied Christ.⁷⁵ The humoral complexion of the artist, reported Lomazzo, can even influence the colors the artist might choose to apply to his painting, with the melancholic tending to dark and obscure colors in his figures.⁷⁶ However, inasmuch as such images are intended to prompt feelings of sorrowful repentance in preparation for spiritual elevation, they do not contradict Lomazzo's presumption that melancholy, when subjected to the supernatural frenzies, is enabled to assist the creative act.

The Ficinian input into Lomazzo's thinking, as we would expect, also dictated an astrological influence on the artist's genial powers. Just as the genius of a given poet of words might owe to a divine

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁷³ Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte*, lib. II, cap. 2, Vol. I, p. 179.

⁷⁴ Lomazzo, *Della forma delle muse*, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte*, lib. II, cap. 9, Vol. I, p. 214 (Barocchi, I, 349).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, lib. VI, cap. 9, Vol. II, pp. 123-24.

frenzy mediated by the Muse Polinnia dwelling in the sphere of Saturn, declared Lomazzo, so can the same be said for a poet of color and visual form. An artist so affected, distinguished in demeanor from another artist who might find some other planetary disposition and choice of a Muse more compatible with his personality and aims, “becomes insuperable” and “overcomes all things.” It is the steadfast character of this *energia inspiratrice della poetica*, Lomazzo proclaimed in this connection, that “it cannot be conquered or blemished by inferior things, having as its object to impel bodies from their slumber to an awakening of the mind, from the dark shadows of ignorance to the light, from death to life, and from Lethan oblivion to remembrance.” Applied to the poets proper, “its aim is to agitate, stimulate and inflame the cognition of divine things, and to explain in verse the things which one contemplates and foresees.”⁷⁷ Translated into the language of the visual arts, the aim of the *energia inspiratrice* is to explicate through the forms placed on walls and canvasses and carved into stone the same sublime objects of contemplation and prophetic illumination which poets attempt to explicate through metered verse.

* * *

That an ancient magical sage like Hermes Trismegistus should appear in testimonies to the divine origin of poetic and artistic genius had to do, as we have earlier seen, with more than the celebrated Hermetic maxim that the arts were born in association with religion. The Hermetic ingredient in these writings was the consequence of the insight on the part of art theorists like Zuccaro, Alberti, and Lomazzo that the creative act of the poet or artist can be viewed as a kind of magical performance. After all, did not the poet or artist, with access to the occult powers of love, create living images of great aesthetic appeal just as surely as an ancient magician like Hermes Trismegistus formed statuesque images and infused them with life? Along the way the poets and artists could view themselves as emulators of God Himself Who formed the world out of nothingness in a primordial act of magical creativity.

Conversely, as earlier established and now to be revisited in some later Renaissance versions, the Hermeticists could look upon magic itself as an art worthy, like poetry and its visual correlatives, to serve

⁷⁷ Lomazzo, *Della forma delle muse*, pp. 17–18.

as a handmaiden to theology. Much as earlier writers, from Boccaccio onward, invoked Plato to legitimize a theory of poetic theology—of *theologia poetica*, so did these, also with Plato's help, seek to legitimize a theory of magical theology—of *theologia magica*. To the extent that such magic was held to be naturally based, the equivalent of *magia naturalis*, it could be interpreted as finding in natural melancholy a fitting humoral agent to mediate the divine frenzy. In this way, as we will now observe more closely, the late Renaissance magicians, like their earlier antecedents, found a way of turning Aristotelian natural philosophy to their innovative purposes.

C. *The Hermetic Testaments*

Following a trend of ancient Neoplatonism, conveniently mediated and reformulated by Ficino the previous century with the additional ingredient of a revived Hermeticism, the fusion of philosophical with magical precepts had become a commonplace of the late Renaissance. Typifying these occult tendencies was Giambattista della Porta (1538–1615), whose *Magia naturalis* stands out as a foremost testament of this period to a preoccupation with discovering the hidden causes of things lurking beneath their surface effects. Concerning the hidden causes of human genius, it is true, Della Porta in this most celebrated of his writings betrayed an attitude toward the melancholy complexion resembling more that of the physicians than of the philosophers, characterizing the black bile as a pungent and noxious humor which produces insomnia and delusory, anxiety-provoking phantasms.⁷⁸ In another of his writings, however, this time more specifically addressing the subject of human physiognomy, Della Porta pointed the way to how the ignominious melancholy complexion could be transformed into the “heroic affection” associated by Ficino with the Platonic frenzies. Taking his lead from the relevant section of the Aristotelian *Problemata*, Della Porta extended the label of hero to embrace not only such heroes of great physical strength and prowess as Hercules and Prometheus, but also “heroes of the mind” as Pythagoras and Plato. Provided that it is moderately heated, Della Porta reiterated the Ficinian genial theory, the melancholy humor

⁷⁸ Giambattista della Porta, *Magiae naturalis, sive de miraculis rerum naturalium libri IIII* (Antwerp: Ex officina Christophori Plantini, 1561), lib. II, cap. 16, fol. 84^r.

is able to arouse those over whom it rules to become “extraordinary in their genius, not through disease, but through a natural disposition.”⁷⁹

Natural melancholy, according to this amalgamated philosophical-magical vision of the world, represents a special case of natural magic—of *magia naturalis*, one foremost function of which is to assist its operator in penetrating into the occult workings of nature and, with the knowledge gained thereby, in performing great marvels. As portrayed by the theorists of this vision, the ancient magicians, numbering Hermes Trismegistus among their outstanding representatives, were notable not only for discovering occult cures for the demonic form of melancholy and other corporeal diseases not accessible to conventional Galenic medicine, but also for expropriating melancholy from the demons and enlisting it on behalf of higher spiritual goals.

This magical dimension of the melancholy vogue offered a further explanation for the derivation of the heated effervescence said to be indispensable to the mystical experience. For much as the Hermeticists considered love to be a kind of transformative magic, so did they reciprocally find in magic, epitomized in its alchemical form, an occult inflammatory source for the enkindlement and purification of love. At the more superficial level of physical nature, the Renaissance Hermeticists believed that they could apply their purgative fire to the cure of human disease, thereby substituting the traditional Hippocratic-Galenic theory of medicine with a revolutionary alternative. At a deeper level, however, the Hermeticists, with the related theories of divine frenzy and of inflamed genial melancholy at their disposal, believed that their art had as its object the purgative cure, not only of the material body, but also of the immaterial soul.

Illustrating this purgative reading of melancholy in the early cinquecento, pointing the way thereby, as he put it in a characteristically occultist way in the title of one of his writings, to a magical “transformation of man into God,” was the Hermeticized Platonist Giulio Camillo Delminio (1480–1544). “In seeking divine conversion (*alla*

⁷⁹ Della Porta, *De humana physiognomia* (Naples: Apud Josephum Cacchium, 1586), lib. I, cap. 8, p. 14. Cf. *Physiognomiae coelestis libri sex* (Naples: Ex typographia Jo. Baptistae Subtilis, 1603), lib. II, cap. 5, p. 23; cap. 7, pp. 26–27. On Della Porta’s doctrine of melancholy genius see also Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 51–54, with this last-cited passage indicated at p. 52.

conversione divina),” as Delminio set forth this transformative principle in memorable fashion, “a man cannot consent to depart from his animal soul unless by means of contemplation, nor contemplate unless he becomes pensive, nor become resolutely pensive unless by means of melancholy (*se non per il mezzo della maninconia*).”⁸⁰ Putting the same mystical insight in the language of alchemy, Flavio Girolamo (16th cent.) set forth as a working hypothesis of his *Nuova minera d’oro* that external success in the alchemical laboratory inherently depends on a corresponding purificatory transmutation taking place within the soul of the operator. Such a spiritually wrenching purgative process, Girolamo insisted, even as it is charged with ultimately ridding the body of melancholy, is required to incorporate melancholy into its cathartic means.

Just as traditional Christian mystics characteristically sought a solitary setting for the fulfillment of their spiritual objectives, so did a self-proclaimed mystical alchemist like Girolamo. “As a result of the above-stated labors, and of his need to carry out his operations attentively and beyond all measure,” Girolamo observed in recognition of this requirement, “the chemist is disposed to remain solitary and silent,” the reason being that “in this state he conceals lofty things in his mind, and flees that which is able to distract him both from his observations and from a consideration of those various effects which he has observed.”⁸¹ The melancholy necessarily contracted by the alchemist in his solitary isolation was identified by Girolamo with

⁸⁰ Giulio Camillo Delminio, *Lettera . . . del rivolgimento dell’uomo a Dio*, in *Tutte le opere* (Venice: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari et Fratelli, 1552), pp. 49, 51. Tract also found in Francesco Sansovino, ed. *Delle lettere amorose di diversi huomini illustri libri nove* (Venice: Appresso gli Heredi de Alessandro Griffio, 1588), lib. VII, fols. 89^v ff. On Delminio, famous for his “memory theater” drawing on Platonic and Hermetic themes, see Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1969), pp. 135 ff. On the significance of this writing for Renaissance alchemical mysticism see my article: “Alchemy and Melancholy in Medieval and Renaissance Thought: A Query into the Mystical Basis of their Relationship,” *Ambix*, 32 (1985), 127–48, at p. 137.

⁸¹ Flavio Girolamo, *Nuova minera d’oro* (Venice: Appresso Barezzi Barezzi, 1590), p. 68. While Thorndike seems to have missed this tract, François Secret did not, as revealed in his “Notes Sur Quelques Alchimistes Italiens de la Renaissance,” *Rinascimento: Rivista dell’Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*, 2nd series, 23 (1973), 197–217 (at p. 210). This theme is the focus of two of my articles: “Was Paracelsus a Disciple of Trithemius?,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 10 (1979), 71–82, and “Alchemy and Melancholy in Medieval and Renaissance Thought . . .” (see prior note), with Girolamo treated, p. 128.

the condition of blackness (*nigredo*) which the members of his profession commonly believed to be the starting point of all successful alchemical operations.⁸²

Furnishing Girolamo with ancient authoritative testimony to the indispensability of melancholy for the solitary alchemical process, besides the “Egyptian” Trismegistus, were many of the great Greco-Roman sages, among whom are named “the disciples of Pythagoras, who lived in silence for five years, as did also Numa, taught by Egeria; Solon, taught by Athena; Charon, taught by Saturn; Minos, taught by Jupiter; and Lycurgus, taught by Apollo.” Confessing that, at an earlier stage in his career, he had been swayed by the complaint of alchemy’s detractors that it induces excessive melancholy with damaging results, he found cause thereafter, chastened by harsh experience, to change his mind. “I now realize,” he explained, “that these are in error, the reason being that, once finding myself in a similar state, I suddenly remembered a saying of Aristotle that all persons of genius are melancholic.”⁸³

Confirming this thesis for Girolamo was the decision of the ancient Romans, recounted by the historians, to bury the state treasury under temple of Saturn. Setting him apart from those who perceived a merely practical motive in this decision by maintaining that the Roman officials only wished Saturn’s sacred ground to secure their treasury from theft, Girolamo read into that choice an additional symbolical motive “because it was given them to understand how silence and secrecy were necessary if they wished to become rich and preserve their wealth.” By the same token, “why is it said that the age of Saturn was the age of gold, unless it is because gold is not procured except by melancholy and by saturnine contemplatives?”⁸⁴ The gold to which Girolamo here refers, of course, is not

⁸² Thus, according to Schmitz, “Das Melancholieproblem . . .,” p. 154n (my trans.): “The alchemist, following a widespread conception of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was held to be a melancholic and child of Saturn. For, according to alchemical theory, the adept first must always overcome a melancholy phase of his experimentation . . . before he is able to arrive at his *opus magnum*.” On the coloring sequence in alchemy see Read, *Prelude to Chemistry*, pp. 12–17, and Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX, Vol. 12 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 228–9. On the association of *nigredo* with melancholy see also Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX, Vol. 13 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 152, 328–30.

⁸³ Girolamo, *Nuova miniera d’oro*, pp. 68–69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

of material but of spiritual substance, acquired only after an arduous purificatory process in solitary seclusion. For Girolamo the quest for material gold was closely dependent on a corresponding attainment of a spiritual, gold-like purity of soul on the part of the alchemical operator.

Much as traditional mystics borrowed from alchemy to help characterize the transformative process of purification, alchemical theorists like Girolamo can be said to have reciprocated by borrowing from the mystics. In the alchemical version of mysticism, as in its conventional versions, both solitude and melancholy played key roles in establishing conditions propitious for spiritual purification. Nevertheless, inasmuch as they were working under the pressures of the witch persecutions in full rampancy during their time, Renaissance occultists like Girolamo needed to pay close attention to how their expressions of mystical ecstasy differed from those accused of sorcery.

It was with this concern in mind, for example, that the Neapolitan Cabalist Cesare Evoli (fl. 1580), in an "apology" inserted into his *De divinis attributis*, addressed himself to the mystical ecstasies of certain women who, in their alienation, seem "to transcend the bounds of nature" (*finem naturae transcendere*).⁸⁵ Those who attempt to gauge the causes behind the manic-like behavior of a given female mystic, Evoli acknowledged, may find themselves baffled, with some interpreting her conduct as divinely inspired and others as demonically inspired. Evoli's difficulty in resolving this diagnostic dilemma was complicated by his acceptance of the Ficinian thesis that divine as well as demonic inspiration is able to find in melancholy an appropriate natural medium.

Those viewing the alienated states of a such female mystics in a favorable light, according to Evoli, are presented with two possible scenarios of interpretation. The first scenario has them directly inspired by God without the need for intervening mediation, and the second scenario has them inspired through the medium of angels, of the planets, of the natural bodily humors, or of a combination of these.

⁸⁵ Cesare Evoli, *De divinis attributis, quae Sephirot ab Hebraeis nuncupantur* (Venice: Apud Dominicum de Farris, 1589), "apologia," p. 75. Thorndike does not cite this tract, though he does mention, in *Magic*, VI, 414, another writing by Evoli in the same mode, titled *De causis antipathiae et sympathiae rerum naturalium*. For an attempt to sort out Jewish Cabalistic from "Egyptian" hermetic elements in Renaissance occultism, see Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), intro., p. 1, and passim.

Those adopting an unfavorable view of a mystic's alienation, on the other hand, "think that she is moved neither by God nor by intelligences, but is vexed by a perturbation of demons or by a very bitter imbalance of black bile."⁸⁶ Though he did not reject the possibility of the latter kinds of debilitating afflictions in some cases, Evoli granted the possibility of the former kinds of uplifting afflictions in other cases.

In one as in the other form of ecstatic alienation Evoli insisted on the need for the sense-based apparatus of the imagination to receive the intelligible species, inasmuch as, in the act of ecstasy, "all things are completed by means of those mediating organs or objects, by which they are able to perfect their operations."⁸⁷ In this way, he noted, even as the body of the mystic outwardly appears to be invaded by natural melancholy, her soul is able to penetrate beyond the natural realm "to the arcana of God, enabling her even to foretell the future." Regardless of the outward natural effects of rapture or ecstasy, he maintained, the essential power behind it is a supernatural one by which the mystic, "after raising up her mind by a vehement contemplation, more fruitfully receives the light of God, and enjoys the divine Good, as far as her human capacity allows, in this mortal life."⁸⁸

If Plato's mystical and prophetic frenzies provided late Renaissance Hermeticists with one highly amenable genial medium for carrying out their occult operations, another was the love frenzy, given popular currency by Ficino in his notion of the *magia amoris*. Typifying this approach in its later Renaissance manifestations was the *Magia d'amore* of Guido Casoni (1575–1640), a work in which many miracles were said to be performed by the "amorous union" (*l'union amorosa*) effected between man and God, with the greatest of these miracles claimed to be, on the authority of the ancient Egyptian magus Hermes Trismegistus, the ability of a man "to transform himself into the nature of God."⁸⁹ While Casoni did not expressly call on the melancholy humor to assist in this amorously transformative process, an older contemporary working in the same genre, Alessandro Farra (16th cent.), did.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁹ Guido Casoni, *Della magia d'amore* (Venice: Appresso Fabio, & Agostin Zoppini, 1592 [colophon: 1591]), dial. I, fol. 10^r.

"Man," declared Farra under the same Hermetic guidelines as Casoni, "toils for nothing other than to make himself into a god." And for Farra, as for Casoni after him, a foremost function of love was to assist the human soul in achieving its aspired resemblance to God (*simiglianza d'Iddio*).⁹⁰ Though each of the divine frenzies in its turn—mystical, prophetic, poetic, and amorous—can justly claim a part in expediting the passage of the soul into God, contended Farra, it is the love frenzy that culminates the purgative sequence. "Love, the final expression of the divine frenzy," proclaimed Farra, "conjoins to God the soul which has been reduced to unity, and transforms it perfectly into God."⁹¹ And if the principles of Platonic philosophy could be utilized by Farra in support of this exalted view of love, so could the principles of Hermetic and Neoplatonic magic.

The Hermetic maxim that constitutes the core of Farra's genial outlook extols the human being as "a miracle, and an animal worthy of being adored." Being originally derived from the angels, Farra contended, man vehemently tries to recover his place among the angels, but one step removed, as it were, from complete emergence in the Godhead. Echoing themes dear to Ficino and Pico before him, Farra likened the soul in strenuous pursuit of this sublime objective to "a chameleon, or to a miraculous Prometheus."⁹² But whereas Casoni, in his comparable blend of Platonic and Hermetic precepts, stopped short at granting the divine frenzy of love a natural auxiliary in the melancholy humor, Farra did not feel so constrained. A common characteristic of those under the spell of the supernatural frenzies, Farra conceded, is the melancholy complexion, an outstanding example of which, he averred, was the melancholic lover of wisdom Socrates "according to the judgment of Aristotle."⁹³

At the same time Farra thought it advisable to voice the admonition that the presence of melancholy in the heroic lover should not mislead us into reducing his amorous frenzies into a mere natural indisposition. Melancholy, Farra maintained, is nothing more than a material cause employed by the lover in association with higher efficient, formal, and final causes to help produce "a life

⁹⁰ Alessandro Farra, *Della divinità dell'huomo*, in *Tre discorsi* (Pavia: Appresso Girolamo Bartoli, 1564), fol. 4^r. Each of these three discourses are separately folioed.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 11^v.

⁹² *Ibid.*, fol. 8^r.

⁹³ Farra, *Discorso de' miracoli d'amore*, in *Tre discorsi*, fols. 9^v-10^r.

separated from the body.”⁹⁴ Though it can justly be stated that “a man naturally desires to be God,” it is also true that “a man in nature is not adequate to be transformed into divinity.”⁹⁵ For Farra as for Ficino before him, the art of natural magic could reach beyond its own finite limits. If, however, magic were to succeed in bursting the bonds of nature, it needed to be subordinated, together with melancholy in its service, to the higher supernatural purpose which is the subject of theology.

For Farra, moreover, the science of astrology impinging on this subject similarly owed deference to theology, the implication being that the planets most directly bearing on love melancholy, Venus and Saturn, should be viewed, not as mere instruments of natural instigation, but as mediating agents of the supernatural frenzies. Concerning the planet in particular most commonly identified with melancholy, Farra declared that “it is under the reign of Saturn, that is, of the intellectual world, that those dwell who, according to the Platonists, blissfully contemplate the supernal forms.”⁹⁶ But whereas Farra’s vision of miracle-working love can be said to constitute at bottom a version of Platonism with Hermetic infiltration, the comparable vision of one who revealed familiarity with his tract, the Paracelsian Cesare della Riviera (d. ca. 1615), rather constitutes a version of Hermeticism with Platonic infiltration. As one of the more informative windows of late Renaissance thought into how the Hermetic movement played into the vogue of melancholy genius, it is here worth an extended exposition.

* * *

In guiding its reader along an Hermetic path Della Riviera’s *Il magico mondo de gli heroi* can largely be characterized as a commentary on the Hermetic Emerald Table—the *Tabula smaragdina*, the basic credo of alchemists characterized by the author as “a brief summary and a very lofty compendium of natural magic, and of the fruit of what that magic is wont to produce in its heroic sons.”⁹⁷ Significantly, as its full title suggests, Della Riviera adopted from the Platonists more

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 8^v.

⁹⁵ Farra, *Della divinità*, in *Tre discorsi*, fol. 3^v.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 7^v.

⁹⁷ Cesare della Riviera, *Il magico mondo de gli heroi*, Mantua: Per Francesco Osanna, 1603, lib. I, p. 33. On this work see Thorndike, *Magic*, VII, 275–6. Serving as a safely Christian intermediary of this doctrine for Della Riviera, as attested by ref-

than the notion of a unifying and vivifying bond of love—a *legame amoroso*.⁹⁸ He also adopted the concept of heroic endeavor by means of which the power of love is presumed to effect its marvelous feats. Moreover, in spelling out his alchemically conceived theory, Della Riviera let it be known that, even as the “magical hero” strives to purge himself of the darkness of melancholy, he must also accept a period of melancholy, corresponding to lead (*palumbo*) in the alchemical list of metals under Saturn’s dominion, as a stage that is necessarily to be endured by the alchemist on the way to his sublime goal.

To be sure, under the duress of the witch persecutions, Della Riviera accepted that great dangers reside in magic and melancholy alike. Concerning the first of these dangers he freely acknowledged that a form of black or goetic magic “is founded solely in the iniquitous works of the fraudulent demons, which produces no other fruit for its followers than damnation and eternal death.” And concerning the second, he equally conceded that, if one is to put the Devil to flight, “at the same instant you are to put to flight the melancholy humor and black bile, and, in short, every filth and impurity which is caused by the unhappy influx of Saturn, which things, having similitude with the misery of Hell, are loved by the impure spirits, and made their habitations and nests, both within and without the human body.”⁹⁹ At the same time Della Riviera recognized an alternative way of thinking about the effects of both magic and melancholy that located them at opposite poles from their demonic versions. Terming the favorable form of magic, in keeping with his Hermetic legacy, *magia naturalis*, he further identified the favorable form of melancholy, in his mind a specialized instance of natural magic, with the moderately adust form which Ficino had determined to be the special mark of the “magical hero” to which his tract was addressed.

erences in lib. I, p. 38, and lib. II, pp. 108 and 209, was the German abbot Trithemius of an earlier generation, who had called upon the identical text to highlight the cathartic goal of magic on the model of the alchemists. On this Trithemian background to Della Riviera’s magic see my *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, with Della Riviera treated at page 182–83. The occasional choice of the term *ars spagirica* in the same context also betrays the influence of Paracelsus on Della Riviera’s thought. His familiarity with Farra is indicated at p. 211.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. I, p. 50.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, lib. II, p. 169.

On the subject of magic Della Riviera took a cue from Pico della Mirandola by characterizing it as “issuing from and infused by God,” as “nothing else but the absolute and consummate perfection of true natural philosophy,” and as “the fountain and refulgent knowledgeable source of all the natural sciences.”¹⁰⁰ Given his ties to the the Paracelsian movement, it should not surprise us that one of the more prominent functions of such divinely sanctioned magic recognized by Della Riviera is its medical function, a feature, as we saw in the previous chapter, tending to discourage a claim on behalf of melancholy’s potential benefits. But a fuller assessment of Della Riviera’s occult outlook reveals that, unlike the earlier treated Hermeticists considering melancholy more of an obstacle than aid to their alchemical-based drive to achieve divine-like purity, he contrarily recognized the existence of certain positive traits in the black bile which could turn it away from demonic use and to the use of the divine frenzies.

In its remedial capacity Della Riviera held the medicine of the magus to be occultly endowed with therapeutic powers better suited to eradicating the conditions of demonic infestation than the conventional Galenic version. Such salutary *medicina magica*, he averred, putting it at odds with the ineffectually allopathic Galenic form with its ties to the sterile Peripatetic philosophy, teaches us “that it is not through antipathy, but through sympathy, that the human infirmities are perfectly and securely cured.”¹⁰¹ Of the many diseases illustrating this homeopathic principle for Della Riviera, speaking especially to his point was the infirmity diagnosed by the physicians as melancholy. What sets Della Riviera’s version of Hermetic medicine apart from others earlier treated in this study, however, is that, under Ficino’s influence, he detected in melancholy the capacity to become transformed from a resisting impediment to a cooperative aid in the process of alchemical sublimation. Putting the same idea in terms of his homeopathic principles, he detected in melancholy the seeds of its own cure.

It is not by chance, Della Riviera pointed out, that the type of magical medicine he advocated, being derived from occult virtues transmitted to us from the sun, “is greatly abhorred by the Demon,” inasmuch as the Devil “a deadly enemy of the light, and of the solarian virtues, properties, and qualities in its proximity, above all

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, lib. II, p. 158.

loves sad, melancholy, obscure, and gloomy things.” From a jointly demonological-astrological standpoint this is a view that appears to put not only natural melancholy in a bad light, but also the planet Saturn presumed to rule over melancholy—an opinion confirmed by Della Riviera’s further declaration that the gloomy darkness to which demons are drawn is bestowed “through the nature and complexion of Saturn and Mars, as the superstitious enchanter well know who find it advantageous in their malefic operations to observe the constellations of these planets.”¹⁰² A further perusal of Della Riviera’s tract, however, reveals that this highly unflattering assessment of melancholy is not his last word on the subject. It is balanced by another, more complimentary assessment placing him, not in opposition to the current melancholy vogue, but among its enthusiastic participants. After all, as he realized, Ficino too, a prime theoretical influence on his thinking, also recommended solarian remedies to counter some of the more excruciating effects of his Saturn-induced afflictions.

Ficino’s influence on Della Riviera’s thought is not merely an implicit one. It is also at times made explicit, as when, referring to two favored images of the magical profession he considered to comprise keys to the magician’s divine-like creative powers—the Philosopher’s Stone (*Pietra Philosophica*) and the “Tree of Life” (*Arbor della Vita*), Della Riviera maintained that both embody the occult quintessence “which otherwise has been defined by Marsilio Ficino in his *Trattato delle tre vite* as the spirit of the Soul of the world, diffused through the corporeal and elemental parts.”¹⁰³ Underscoring the same Ficinian background of Della Riviera’s thinking was his reference to the four frenzies of Plato, culminating in the frenzy of love, said to infuse the magus with superterrestrial powers; one so divinely gifted, attested Della Riviera, “is armed with subtle and perspicacious genius.”¹⁰⁴ But while drawing on Ficino for certain of his themes, Della Riviera drew for others on a foreign Platonist of a different stripe, the speculative German cardinal Nicholas Cusanus, whose vision of ontological and epistemological discontinuity between the finite and infinite spheres of existence provided him with an alternative cosmic construct to Ficino’s for interpreting the heroic quest. Probably influenced by the magically disposed German abbot Trithemius

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, lib. I, p. 50. On Ficino’s solarian medicine see above, p. 86n.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 44.

(1462–1516) in this regard, who had utilized Cusanus in the same way,¹⁰⁵ Della Riviera envisioned his heroic prototype as endeavoring to traverse, by a vigorous force of the will, the rationally untraversable divide separating finite nature from the infinite realm existing beyond nature.

Following Cusanus' lead, Della Riviera noted that the soul in God's image "is nothing else but a certain correspondence (*adequatione*) of the intellect with divinity, in the same manner that the finite is able to correspond (*adequarsi*) to the infinite."¹⁰⁶ Repeating Cusanus' famous mathematical comparison of the human intellect to a polygon, which, following finitely progressive increases in the number of its sides, approaches but never perfectly converges with a circle, Della Riviera went beyond Cusanus' advocacy of philosophical humility by offering up magic as an answer to the philosophical dilemma posed by the *coincidentia oppositorum*. A fully stated rendering of Della Riviera's magical vision, accordingly, can be considered a coalescence of Hermetic magic with two different philosophical visions evolving out of the Platonic tradition. One vision establishes rational incommensurability between the finite and infinite realms of existence, and the other vision offers a way to traverse the breach foreclosed to reason by an "heroic" exertion of human genius infused by divine frenzy.

Those who pursue the secrets of divine wisdom through the art of magic, Della Riviera proclaimed, are justly dubbed not merely "occult philosophers" and "true sapisents," but also "heroes" by virtue of being endowed with the inward capacity to transcend ordinary natural limitations of the mind. In their effort to gain respectability among their philosophers, he declared, the magicians understandably draw us back to the ancient wellsprings of their art. "For human wisdom," he maintained, "was, from the beginning, named with diverse words according to the diversity of tongues; and it was first of all called magic by those first wise men of Persia." Only noble and heroic souls are to be granted access to such arcane wisdom, "for it is not fitting that the heavenly secrets of the great Mother Nature should be violated and profaned by vulgar souls immersed in the shadows and filth of ignorance, and in the carnal affections."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., my *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, pp. 132 and 159. Cf. above note 97.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, lib. II, p. 111. On the infiltration of Cusanus' philosophical speculations into Italy see Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, ch. 2, pp. 46 ff.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, lib. I, pp. 10–11.

A further examination of Della Riviera's Hermeticized concept of "heroicism" reveals that he conceived it along lines laid out by Ficino in his revised theory of heroic love melancholy, a notion reciprocally labeled the *magia amoris* in many contemporary love treatises.

The question raising its head, in light of a pronounced anti-Peripatetic bias characterizing this writing, is how a doctrine of melancholy genius popularly believed to owe to an Aristotelian origin can credibly be integrated into Della Riviera's magical picture? Whereas Ficino had sought to integrate Aristotelian naturalist principles into his philosophical-magical vision, Della Riviera contrarily determined that the Aristotelian philosophy fell short of reaching those darkly hidden places to which his magical hero aspired. The impoverished Aristotelians, Della Riviera chided, foolishly imagine that they are able to penetrate to the arcana of the infinite, shrouded in obscurity, "armed with the shield of their sterile Peripatetic philosophy."¹⁰⁸ The solution to this seeming contradiction lies in the Hermetic context in which it is posed. For whereas the Platonic method traditionally denigrated matter as an obstacle to a purification of the human soul in the divine image, the Hermetic method, on the model of alchemy, customarily integrated matter into their cathartic pursuit. In this way Hermeticists like Della Riviera, even as they deprecated the Peripatetic philosophy for its inadequacies, found a genial theory linked to the melancholy humor by Aristotle amenable to their occult outlook.

The image of God emulated by the magical hero, Della Riviera avowed, is of the Creator-God, Who, besides demonstrating a refusal to stay above material things at the time of cosmic creation, has subsequently shown that He is not adverse to intervening in the material world when the occasion warrants. Echoing the Emerald Table in this regard, Della Riviera characterized material nature as issuing from "the amorous union between the sun and the moon."¹⁰⁹ For this reason Della Riviera's quest for divinity was directed, not to a place above the earth, but deep into the earth's bowels, where there reputedly reside hidden powers capable of bridging the vast gulf separating nature from supernature. "It is the earth, therefore," Della Riviera averred, "which is the subject of human wisdom."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, lib. I, p. 35.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8. Significantly in this regard, whereas Ficino had elected to derive the Greek word "hero" (*heros*) from the word for "love" (*eros*), following a common

The starting point of the magus for Della Riviera was literally that, “a point, as it were, indivisible and imperceptible, although it becomes known to the hero, and is rendered to him manifest and divisible, and is the root and origin of all his magical marvels.”¹¹¹ By tapping into this primordial source of miraculous power, wrote Della Riviera, the magician is enabled in effect to repeat the miracle of creation; “by forming his heroic stone,” as he put this thesis, “the hero acquires authoritative means from the divine and uncreated Wisdom to imitate its creation of the universe.”¹¹² And for Della Riviera the black humor ruled by the planet Saturn, even as it was equipped to serve as a demonically utilizable impediment blocking the access of the magus to the divine powers of creation, was also equipped to serve as a divinely utilizable agent for gaining access to those infinitely removed powers.

Della Riviera’s ambivalence toward melancholy corresponded to a comparable ambivalence toward planetary Saturn, the celestial body commonly held by the alchemists to govern over the metal lead as it underwent transmutation into “solarian” gold. “Saturnine lead,” he observed in this regard, “is called the father of all the gods, that is, of all the other magical metals, since they are all concealed within it from the beginning.” It is the divinely-imposed calling of the magical hero, he asserted, to disclose to the world at large the powers of the metals which were formerly hidden. “In the workshop of the magical world,” he explained, “they pass into the light, being made manifest and evident by the hero with his spagyric art.”¹¹³ Enlarging on the saturnine basis of this revelatory process, Della Riviera noted that since magical lead (*piombo magico*) “is subject to the planet Saturn, from which it is called saturnine, so does the magical lead straightaway, and in reality, become of the same nature as Saturn.”¹¹⁴

From this presentation by Della Riviera it is not difficult to understand why he saw humoral melancholy, likewise under saturnine auspices, as being eminently adaptable to the magical hero’s purgative

medical topos, Della Riviera, *ibid.*, lib. I, p. 13, alternatively derived *heros*, following the fifth-century philologist Martianus Capella in his *Nuptiae philologiae et mercurii*, from “Hera, which signifies the earth, for the earth is nothing else but matter.” Cf. p. 96, where, with Boccaccio’s *Genealogia deorum gentilium* as his source, Cesare also derived the name of Heracles from Hera.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

goals. Acting as a combustive agent of catharsis within the alchemist's soul, according to his occult guidelines, melancholy corresponds to the combustive putrefaction of lead in the extrinsic alchemical process. Alchemical catharsis, as Della Riviera pictured it, is literally that, and nothing more. It above all is not, as the vulgar would have us believe, the literal transmutation of one substance into another.¹¹⁵ Applying this principle to the substance termed magical lead, Della Riviera invoked the authority of ancient sages like Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and above all Hermes Trismegistus to establish that "lead in its most profound and innermost essence is gold, and, contrarily, gold in its secret recesses is lead, the paradigm of every other metal."¹¹⁶ It followed for Della Riviera that, just as the essence of lead is retained by the alchemist in his final purified product, so is the essence of melancholy initiating his own internal alchemical process. Nor is this coincidental, since melancholy and lead, through their joint subjection to the planet Saturn, bear intrinsic affiliation.

In this way Della Riviera helped to popularize an idea which his contemporary Giordano Bruno, to be treated below, carried to a still wider audience, namely, that the magical hero alluded to in his title is just as subject to the anguishing torments of melancholy as the most detested demoniac to which he stands theologically opposed. The difference between the two kinds of melancholy, as this view was circulated throughout the intellectual and religious community, is that the demoniac has no incentive to rid himself of his melancholy, whereas the divinely inspired hero is able to utilize his melancholy so that he can eventually overcome it. By this logic, even as the magical hero is exhorted to expunge his defiling melancholy under Saturn's influence, he is also enjoined, emboldened by this same melancholic fervor, to strive without letup to his goal of divine emulation. Just as "gold in its secret recesses is lead," Della Riviera

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80, furnishing the following as an explanation of this cathartic principle: "Alchemy is customarily defined as the transmutative art of metals. But this is falsely stated. Because alchemy does not have the power nor virtue actually to transmute from one species to another, but can only alter the extrinsic metallic forms. Alchemists know that the species of metals cannot be transformed into one another. But they are well able, after removing some of the superficial impurity, to tinge the one with the other, as for example, the white with the red or with the yellow, to the end that it may look like gold. Or else they are able to whiten the copper so that it resembles silver. But in every case the copper remains as the first copper, and the lead as lead, and so on regarding the others."

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

reasoned from his spagyric perspective, so is the Solarian virtue, in the dark depths of those same secret recesses, at one with the saturnine virtue of melancholy.

* * *

As we might expect, the speculative types with whom we will now come into contact, also commonly drawing on the Hermetic traditions but assimilating them to larger philosophical purposes, understandably focused their main attention on the form of human genius which was a mark of their own frequently brooding profession. In so doing, however, as we will also see, they also necessarily touched on ancillary forms of genius such as those pertaining to religious contemplation, prophecy, poetry, and the visual arts. In their roles as philosophers of nature these writers were greatly attracted to the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy, which furnished them with the sense that their wide-ranging speculations owed more to supernatural illumination than to human labor. Yet being immersed in nature at the same time as they attempted to reach a place above nature, they were also generally of a mind, with the disciplines of Galenic medicine, Aristotelian natural philosophy, and natural magic to back them up, to acknowledge a corresponding natural correlate of divine frenzy in a tempered melancholy humor. Even as some nature philosophers drawing on these same traditions were intent on dissolving the syncretical version of human genius bequeathed by Ficino, others, as will now be demonstrated, were just as intent on revalidating Ficino's middle ground between the natural and supernatural causes of human genius.

In a commentary on a love sonnet finding common ground between Plato and Aristotle on the deeper religious meaning of amorous alienation, Pompeo della Barba da Pescia (16th cent.), wrote in the language of astrological medicine: "Saturn seizes the understanding, the reasoning process, the knowledge of mathematics, for which reason we often perceive the mathematicians to be saturnines and melancholics."¹¹⁷ But the powers of mathematical abstraction, according to the vogue going the rounds in Della Barba's day, represents a special case of a more general abstracting capacity that pertains above all to speculative philosophers. For it is the nature of the philo-

¹¹⁷ Pompeo della Barba da Pescia, *Esposizione d'un sonetto Platonico*. . . (Florence: 1549), p. 53.

sophical mind, the participants of this vogue claimed in agreement with Plato's *Symposium* and Ficino's commentary thereof, to move in an upward direction from particular loves to a love of abstract universals. While playing a notable role in this joint philosophical quest of the late Renaissance and Reformation periods, the Hermetic traditions comprised but one of its many strands.

The revised view of human genius characterizing such works of the later Renaissance and Reformation periods reflected, as it were, a changing view of the cosmos within which the heroic act is realized. By and large the genial concepts thus far treated were formulated under guidelines laid down by the previous medieval and early Renaissance centuries. Their cosmic construct was still largely the hierarchical one upon which earlier Platonists and Aristotelians largely agreed, differing only in whether emphasis was to be placed on the superior superterrestrial sectors of the hierarchy or on the inferior terrestrial sectors. Nevertheless, events were swiftly taking place in their time, intellectually adumbrated by the non-hierarchical cosmic system envisioned by the German Cusanus, that would increasingly highlight the inadequacies of the traditional philosophical categories. Goaded by such cataclysmic external events as the witch-craze, the religious reform movements, and geographical discoveries in previously uncharted regions of the world, and further confronted by the humbling implications of a heliocentric cosmic system to replace the inherited geocentric one, it became increasingly encumbant for the intellectuals of Europe to adjust their thought processes to new realities. Yet even as they did so, as will be evident in the remaining pages of this text, they will be shown to carry over old ways of thinking into new philosophical frameworks. The query into genius is no exception.

If we are to choose a longstanding philosophical theme that, more than any other, proved to be adaptable to this revolution in philosophical thinking, none serves us better than that of heroic love. Love, according to the popular literary vogue promoted by the Platonic revival, must follow the same laws of inherent change as the cosmos through which it runs and which it invigorates. As put by the Luccan cleric Tommaso Buoni (fl. 1600), love "is never idle or lazy."¹¹⁸ While this in itself was not a new doctrine, the reason

¹¹⁸ Tommaso Buoni, *Accademiche lezioni di tutte le specie de gli amori humani* (Venice: Appresso Gio. Battista Colosini, 1605), lett. 3, fol. 10^v.

Buoni gave for love's perpetual restlessness did betray the new cosmic attitude which was to find in a subject of our next section, Giordano Bruno, its most prominent philosophical spokesmen.

"The most providential nature," wrote Buoni, "which never knows idleness but is always working either at the new production of forms, or at the growth of bodies, or at the restoration of nature, or at the operation of ordinary generation, or at providing other natural works, is an enemy to idleness and maintains all things in perpetual movement."¹¹⁹ Buoni, that is to say, determined that change is found not only in the means of the soul's amorous aspirations, but also in its ends, corresponding to the perpetual changes of a universe animated by love. Such perpetual cosmic flux necessarily entails a correspondingly perpetual psychological flux between sorrow and joy, or, as alternatively put by the medical texts, between melancholy and mania. While affiliated with a literary tradition that had largely succeeded in turning the theme of love melancholy into a banal and commonplace Renaissance fashion, Buoni thereby resonated with the novel cosmic speculations which were also reflected in many of the philosophical writings now to come to our attention.

Among the notable consequences of the stresses and strains exerted on late Renaissance philosophy by these revolutionary changes in *Weltanschauung* was a disintegration of the Ficinian synthesis of the Platonic supernaturalist and Aristotelian naturalist genial theories. Before arriving at this disintegrative development, however, we will first encounter a group of thinkers who, even while at times betraying the existence of hairline fissures within their genial concepts, were still largely attempting to maintain some kind of equilibrium between their natural and supernatural components. It would remain for others similarly steeped in natural philosophy, the subject of our following chapter, to widen those fissures to the point that they could no longer be systematically bridged.

D. Testaments of the Nature Philosophers

Addressing the subject of melancholy in a "paraphrase" of Galen, the Paduan physician Prospero Calanio (16th cent.), a student of Achillini, revealed that he was motivated by more than medical con-

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 10^r.

siderations. Devoting, as we would expect, the bulk of his discussion to the pathological form of the humor, Calanio disclosed along the way that he was also cognizant of a potentially favorable, non-pathological form. With Galen his guide Calanio noted that "those who possess much cold black bile are stolid and lazy," whereas, at another extreme, "those who possess much heated melancholy, being more prone to outbursts of passion and desire, are impetuous, ingenious (*ingeniosi*), and disposed to love." While having nothing good to say about the frigid form of the melancholy humor, Calanio, with the additional authorities of Aristotle and "divine Plato" informing his subject, saw the matter quite differently concerning the second, adust form—on the proviso, of course, that it is sufficiently moderated. In its tempered state, Calanio determined, "this bile, which we have declared to be born from nature but to transform men into the near-equivalent of gods, ought not be rejected by us as an injurious thing; on the contrary, it ought to be preserved, as far as possible, as something profitable and favorable to our efforts and study." While granting that the formally educated are able to benefit from the advantages of moderately adust melancholy, Calanio beheld the true test of its marvelous hidden powers to reside in its ability to instigate comparable mental feats in the uneducated, by virtue of which, he contended, they are enabled "to expound in matters of philosophy and the arcane sciences, and even to forebode the future (*praesagire*)."¹²⁰

Another Paduan medical writer to appreciate certain more positive traits of melancholy to counteract its negative ones was Cesare Cremonini (1550–1631), a friend of Galileo, who, found one of its more conspicuous representations in the melancholy of love. If, as Plato maintained, the philosophical lover of wisdom represents but a higher form of love in general, Cremonini inquired, why would not a pure sanguine humor be better adapted to the philosophical quest than a sanguine humor mingled with melancholy? The answer, Cremonini replied, lies in two principal advantages of an inflamed melancholy humor over an unmixed sanguine one, the first resting in its ability to restrain and arrest some of the lover's more impetuous outbursts, and the second, in its ability to guide them to higher purposes.

Allowing that those vested with the cold form of melancholy "love with greater difficulty," Cremonini, with Ficino's *De amore* pointing

¹²⁰ Prospero Calanio, *Paraphrasis in librum Galeni De inaequali intemperie* (Lyons: Apud Seb. Gryphium, 1538), "De atra bile," pp. 191–93. On Calanio's genial theory see also Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 28–29.

the way, saw this situation as reversing with the application of heat. As Ficino instructed Cremonini: once melancholics “conceive love, as Plato maintained,” they are more constant than the other temperamental types in the expression of their amatory yearnings and, in addition, “endure longer in their love, not easily changing from one object of love to another.”¹²¹ These two features of love melancholy explained for Cremonini not only why philosophical lovers of wisdom are able to concentrate their passion on a single object, but also why they are better able than their mundane counterparts to transfer their love from an earthly to a heavenly object.

Calanio and Cremonini illustrate that the Platonically conditioned Averroism of the Paduan school, earlier represented by Nifo and Achillini, was still alive and well as the cinquecento turned into the seicento. Indeed, the force of this intellectual climate was strong enough to influence the genial theory of one characterized in a recent study as holding to “a more faithful Peripateticism,” the Pisan botanist-physician Andrea Cesalpino (1519–1603).¹²² But whereas Calanio and Cremonini revolved their discussions around the favorable genial forms countenanced by general consent, Cesalpino, as revealed in his *Daemonum investigatio peripatetica* (1580), rather revolved his discussion around the unfavorable demonic form of genius condemned by general consent. While accepting that melancholy is often found in conjunction with demonic vexation and powers of sorcery, Cesalpino maintained that, since the Devil “uses natural means” (*utitur enim mediis naturalibus*),” his often preferred medium of natural melancholy should be looked on as a secondary material effect of an extramaterial, demonic cause.¹²³ Expressly taking offense at an excessively

¹²¹ Cesare Cremonini, *De facultate appetitiva tractatus*, in *Philosophi primae sedis tractatus tres*, Venice: Apud Guerilios, 1644, p. 244. On Cremonini see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 147, and Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 87–88.

¹²² Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 191, referring to Cesalpino’s *Quaestiones peripateticae* (1571, dedic. 1565). Cesalpino, according to Garin, *ibid.*, “was completely opposed to any indulgence in dreams of magic and understood Aristotelianism to amount to concrete empiricism.” Cf. Colombero, *Uomo e Natura*, pp. 199–200, translating excerpts from Cesalpino’s writings, pp. 221–24.

¹²³ Andrea Cesalpino, *Daemonum investigatio peripatetica*. . . , subsequently published with his *Quaestionum peripateticarum libri V* (Venice: Apud Juntas, 1593), lib. V, cap. 21, fol. 165^v. For an account by Cesalpino of the occasion leading to his authorship of this tract, composed in response to a request by the archbishop of Pisa for members of the university to resolve the question of demonic vexation among a group of nuns, see lib. V, cap. 1, fol. 145^r. Concerning this writing, thereby putting his position at odds with that of Garin cited above (see previous note), Thorndike, *Magic*,

naturalist interpretation of the Stagirite's words by certain of his self-acclaimed followers, some of whom invoked the authority of Avicenna to lend it backing, Cesalpino sought to counteract the claim that Aristotle "reduces those things to natural causes which seem in man to be above nature."¹²⁴

Like Calanio and Cremonini, Cesalpino honed in on love melancholy as presenting an instructive test case for his supernaturalist appeal. But whereas the focus of Calanio and Cremonini was on the genial heights to which love is drawn, Cesalpino's focus was rather on the genial depths occupied by the demons. Observing that the victims of love melancholy sometimes complained to have been seduced and ravished by demonic succubi and incubi, Cesalpino accepted that this complaint was not always unfounded, and that even when it was, demons could still have entered their minds to lead them into their erotic phantasies.¹²⁵ The allegation here that supernatural spirits could lie behind the disease of love melancholy logically entailed for Cesalpino, in underlying concurrence with the Neoplatonic and Hermetic magical traditions, a corresponding allegation that an appropriate medical regimen must also issue out of the same supernatural source—that, in other words, a supernatural cure is required to counter a supernatural disease.

Thus, responding to the question attributed to Hippocrates "whether there is something divine present in diseases," Cesalpino not only answered in the affirmative, but added a significant corollary pertaining to their possible cure. What is necessary to meet and overcome the wicked magic of the demons, proclaimed Cesalpino, is a higher form of divine magic, of which natural magic—*magia naturalis*—represents its terrestrial manifestation. For this reason, attested Cesalpino in language that, it would seem, stands closer to that of the occult-minded Hermeticists than of his adamantly anti-occultist colleague and friend Galileo: "No one doubts but that magic was born from medicine and that, in its role as a salutary good, it has

VI, 338, charges that Cesalpino's "entitling his deluded mixture of theology and gross superstition a Peripatetic investigation must be regarded as a blot upon the escutcheon of Aristotelianism." Significantly, the inquisitor Francesco Maria Guazzo (see above, p. 211), in his *Compendium maleficarum*, lib. II, cap. 8, p. 128, found in Cesalpino philosophical validation for his own stern position on witches.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, cap. 8, fol. 153^r.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 14, fol. 158^r. On the incubi and succubi, commonly held by the demonologists to assume human form and have intercourse with human beings, see Robbins, *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 254–9, 490–2, and Cohn, *Inner Demons*, p. 174 and passim.

creeped in as a higher and holier form of medicine.”¹²⁶ In this connection Cesalpino’s “higher and holier form of medicine” ultimately derived from the same super-terrestrial source as mystical ecstasy and prophetic illumination. Or put another way, following guidelines laid down by Ficino: Cesalpino located in magic both a cure of melancholy in its pathologically demonic form and an abettor of melancholy in the genial forms instigated by what Plato termed the divine frenzies.

That Cesalpino’s analysis of divinely inspired genius followed the same line of reasoning as he applied to demonically instigated genius is made explicit in the pages of the *Daemonum investigatio*, where it is stated: “The fact that Aristotle, in his *Problems*, seems to reduce to natural causes, that is, to the heat of the black bile, the condition of those who are presumed to be instigated by a divine afflatus, is not at all incompatible with those things which have been stated.”¹²⁷ Expanding on this argument in his *Quaestiones peripateticae*, Cesalpino reproached some of his fellow Peripatetics for taking the relevant Aristotelian passage too literally, thereby failing to perceive supernatural causes of genius behind its natural effects. Two closely related psychic phenomena underscored this lesson for Cesalpino: the first, mystical ecstasy, and the second, prophetic illumination.

Just as mystics and prophets experience vigorous movements of the mind induced by their divine revelation, Cesalpino agreed with pseudo-Aristotle, “so do melancholics possess a very quick imaginative virtue and movement.”¹²⁸ Discerning more than coincidence in the similarity between the two states, Cesalpino detected an underlying connection in which melancholy is the physiological correlative of mystical and prophetic alienation. But while fully accepting that melancholy may well be found in collaborative association with ecstatic and prophetic impulses, Cesalpino was persuaded that it acted in a secondary rather than primary capacity. Unhappily, in his view, some Peripatetics had impiously reversed the order of this collaborative relationship by reducing divinely instigated alienation to mere melancholy. Following the same logic as he applied to their demonically incited caricatures, Cesalpino insisted that if melancholy is detected in association with mystical and prophetic experiences, it is in the role of an effect rather than of a true cause.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 22, fol. 166^r.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 21, fol. 165^v.

¹²⁸ Cesalpino, *Peripateticarum quaestionum libri*, qu. 9, fol. 143^r.

Much as prophets are able to conjure mental images of what has never before transpired, Cesalpino theorized, so are poets, philosophers, and the like able to conceptualize in mental images derived from non-existents. Comparing such images to those placed before the eyes by the painters, Cesalpino, following what appears to be an empiricist epistemology, declared them to belong to the sensually driven imagination before being acted on by the reason. As reported by Aristotle in his treatise on memory, he reminded his readers, the ability of reminiscence depends upon "certain movements of those things which we before have sensually apprehended." Nevertheless, lest his Aristotelian empiricism be too narrowly construed, Cesalpino hastened to add that "imagination is not only of the past, but also of the present and the future, and is not only of those things which are, or have been, or shall be, but also of their negating opposites. For it is not necessary that every image be of some existent."¹²⁹ The possibility of imagining the non-existent, just as the possibility of imagining a future which has never yet come to pass, was not comprehensible to Cesalpino under an assumption other than one of supernatural assistance.

As the foregoing examples illustrate, some Renaissance nature philosophers holding to a predominantly Aristotelian frame of reference were still able to make a place for the Platonic doctrine of divine inspiration in their genial theories. For these a purely naturalist construct of human genius could not do justice to the supernatural demands imposed upon it. Even as their medical training put them in close touch with the physiological symptoms of alienation in both kinds, divine and demonic, their philosophical overview, lent them most notably by Ficino, led them to interpret those symptoms as the effects of a higher supernatural cause. While formally listed by the historians as belonging to the Peripatetic school, their Aristotelianism was so interfused with Platonism as to make the categorization one of emphasis rather than of kind.

Harder to categorize as belonging to either school, Platonic or Aristotelian, are three nature philosophers likewise broaching on the question of human genius: Girolamo Fracastoro, Antonio Persio, and Giordano Bruno. The observation made by a leading student of

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* On the Aristotelian tract to which Cesalpino is referring, the *De memoria et reminiscencia*, initiating a long history of memory treatises, see Yates, *Art of Memory*, esp. pp. 46-50, and Paolo Rossi, *Clavis universalis* (Milan/Naples: R. Ricciardi, 1970).

Renaissance thought pertaining to the first of these, Fracastoro, can also be applied to the other two. According to J.H. Randall, Fracastoro, who spent a period of his career at Padua (he studied under Pomponazzi, and his time there coincided with that of Cremonini) belonged to a group of thinkers who "took seriously the Aristotelian insistence on observation and experience, so seriously that they turned against Aristotle's own interpretation of experience."¹³⁰ In each of these cases, however, as will now be demonstrated, the rejection of Aristotle was far from a complete one. For despite their professed discontent with Peripatetic principles, they found that they could not dispense with one crucial Aristotelian precept, to wit, the doctrine of melancholy genius. In corresponding fashion, their "insistence on observation and experience" that allegedly turned them from Aristotle did not exclude the kinds of extrasensual experiences referred to by Plato as the divine frenzies.

Complicating the status of the genius question for the latter two of these thinkers, Persio and Bruno, was their entrance on the scene at a time when the old philosophical systems had filtered into a new cosmic vision that was far more open-ended than the inherited hierarchical one—forged by a combination of novel philosophical thinking like that of Telesio and an alternative planetary model furnished by Copernicus. Yet within the context of this revolutionary cosmic system, as each of the three major late Renaissance nature philosophers now to be treated will illustrate, the query into the origin of human genius continued to boil down to the same basic terms bequeathed by the inherited Platonic and Aristotelian traditions.

* * *

For many advocates of the Ficinian genial theory, we have noted, philosophers and poets were more notable for what united than divided their abstracting abilities. For other advocates, however,

¹³⁰ Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, p. 198. Cf. Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 190, characterizing Fracastoro as determined "to pursue his researches on a very much more rigorously empirical plane" and, in corresponding fashion, "to find the particular causes rather than the universal and first cause." These assessments of Fracastoro contrast with that of Thorndike, *Magic*, V, p. 494, who, while accepting that, in the *De sympathia*, "Fracastoro attempts a physical and natural rather than magical explanation of the phenomena of sympathy and antipathy," nevertheless concludes that "the conception of such relationships was magical in origin." The question of magic aside, it will be established in the following pages that the problem of genius would not easily meet the test of empirical observation for Fracastoro.

among whom can be listed Girolamo Fracastoro (1483–1553), the differences between the philosophical and poetical modes of genial alienation were significant enough to call for separate treatments. The result was two dialogues from Fracastoro's hand with jointly participating interlocutors, the *Naugerius* and the *Turrius*, named for the principal spokesman of the genial conditions therein depicted. Yet, as will now be established, Fracastoro did not go so far down that dual path as to lose sight of a shared ground between them constituting the melding of two independently derived genial doctrines: the first, Plato's doctrine of divine frenzy, and the second, the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius.

The rationale that led Fracastoro to the composition of separate presentations of the two modes of genius, philosophical and poetic, is dramatically laid out at the outset of the *Naugerius*. Seated around a fountain in the vicinity of Baldo, we are told, are some friends engaged in conversation, one among them who, his title character Navagero, with a wild look in his eyes and "as if touched by a Muse, or aroused by the frenzy of Apollo," suddenly bursts out in song. Then, we are told, he opens a copy of Virgil, vehemently but also sweetly and harmoniously reads its verses aloud to his companions, and without explanation throws it aside. Navagero's erratic behavior, as this account continues, acutely contrasts with the quietly sullen demeanor displayed by another member of his group, Turrio. Whereas the poetically inclined Navagero assumes the appearance of a verbose and uncontrolled manic, the philosophically inclined Turrio rather sinks into a kind of morose stupefaction, gazing off into empty space as if he wished to be somewhere else. This markedly variant behavior of the two figures is not lost to their companions, one of whom, Bardulo, calls on the moping Turrio to explain its meaning. Why, Bardulo inquires of Turrio, does he sit in melancholic silence "as if you were another Bellerophon," whereas Navagero, under the same conditions, erupts in frenzied song?¹³¹

¹³¹ Girolamo Fracastoro, *Naugerius*, in *Opera omnia*, 3rd ed. (Venice: Apud Juntas, 1584), fol. 112^r. For a facsimile of this dialogue, with a translation by Ruth Kelso, see *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, IX (1924), with this passage found at p. 50 (corresponding to fol. 154^r) of Latin text. Andrea Navagero (1483–1522), celebrated in his day for his poetic powers, was the librarian at St. Marks Cathedral and official historian of Venice. On Navagero's poetic theory see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, [90]. For the context and significance of this writing see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 167–69. On Fracastoro see Thorndike, *Magic*, V, ch. 22, pp. 488 ff., and on his genial theory in particular, Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 125–28. Fracastoro

The answer, Turrio replies to Bardulo's query, is that differing spirits (*manes diversi*) are drawn into the two figures, the effect of which is to instill them with variant forms of human genius. Whereas, proffered Turrio, "the spirit of Virgil inhabiting this place is vexing Navagero, the spirit of some philosopher who in his life was prone to melancholy, either Democritus or someone of a still more sorrowful temperament, is affecting myself."¹³² Conceding that he is not best qualified to discuss the nature of poetic genius, Turrio gives the platform for this purpose over to the animated Navagero, the sum of which is a presentation of the Platonic inspiration theory. Once that task is accomplished, Turrio promises that he will return with an exposition of what it takes to produce philosophical genius.

Revealing to his friends that he often experiences a sense of divine harmony coming into his soul which causes him to become "seized to a place outside of himself" (*extra se rapti*), Navagero is happy to report that his alienation closely approximates "that Platonic madness which, as brought out in the *Ion*, Socrates thought was sent from Heaven," whereby, he exults, "it causes the pulse to beat with rhythm as if it were aroused by some violent power, and so seizes and agitates the mind that one touched by it is wondrously roused into a state like that of the ecstatics." Likening poets so aroused, "as though touched by God," to the ancient oracles, Navagero goes the further step of declaring the oracles themselves to be poets of a sort who chose to express their divine truths in meter. "It is therefore with justice," Navagero announces, "that the poets merit being called divine, since they alone have invented that divine way of speaking by means of which the gods have deigned to communicate to men through their oracles."¹³³

How, we ask, does this version of divinely inspired genius of poets promulgated by Navagero compare with the melancholy-ridden genius of philosophers to be promulgated by Turrio? At first sight, as brought

is best known today for his medical poem *Syphilis*, coining the modern scientific name for what then was commonly dubbed, through its popular association with the French invasion of Italy after 1494, the *morbus gallicus*. Fracastoro envisaged syphilis as generated by corrupted air in association with unfavorable planetary conjunctions and spreading by means of corpuscular "seeds."

¹³² *Ibid.*, fols. 112^v-113^r (Kelso, facs. fol. 154^r; trans., p. 51).

¹³³ Fracastoro, *Naugerius*, in *Opera omnia*, fol. 117^v (Kelso trans., p. 65, corresponding to p. 40 [fol. 160^v] of facs. Latin text. For the context and significance of this writing see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 167-69, with Fracastoro's Platonism indicated at pp. 168-69. Cf. *Storia*, II, 627-29.

out in the *Turrius*, their differences stand out more prominently than their similarities. A closer examination of the text, however, reveals that, even as he set out to clarify modal differences in these two dialogues between the philosophical and poetic functions, Fracastoro also ascertained a unifying principle that bonded them at a deeper level of analysis.

As revealed through his philosophical mouthpiece Turrio, Fracastoro's ambivalence toward melancholy coincided with his ambivalence toward the solitary way of life with which it was commonly linked. From his medical perspective Fracastoro determined that natural choleric, phlegmatic, and, above all, melancholic "respond to all things with displeasure, for which reason they flee the company of others and become solitaries," whereas sanguines, being of a naturally more affable disposition, seek out "societies, and songs, spectacles, games, and other things to which their race are especially prone."¹³⁴ Should we stop here we might well classify Fracastoro among the cinquecento apologists of civic humanism, for which he could be said to provide a medical rationale. Inasmuch, however, as he viewed this matter not only from the lower ground of medicine, but also from the higher ground of philosophy, Fracastoro did not stop here, declaring the melancholy of solitude to offer certain advantages to counteract its well known disadvantages. The foremost of these, Turrio informs us, uniting mystics, prophets, poets, and philosophers in a joint venture, consists of its ability to induce a "fixed imagination" (*fixa imaginatio*).

Left to its own devices, Turrio allows that a melancholy imagination can work as readily to the detriment as to the benefit of its philosophical sufferer, as when he acknowledges that some in its grasp "believe that they see gods, choruses of angels, and similar such things."¹³⁵ Indeed, it is this very trait of melancholy, according to Turrio, that makes it so advantageous to the demons, who thereby seek to seduce well-meaning souls through the medium of melancholy-induced phantasms. For issuing out of melancholy's core symptoms of fear and sorrow, Turrio instructs his companions, are a number of secondary symptoms, such as restlessness, insomnia, and an uncontrolled imagination, that are readily coopted by the demons.

¹³⁴ Fracastoro, *Turrius*, lib. II, in *Opera omnia*, fol. 144^r. Focusing on the *Turrius* is Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 200–201.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 143^r.

Of the more notable consequences of these demonically induced melancholic symptoms, Turrio concedes, one is a tendency of their sufferers to offer revolutionary answers to traditional questions; melancholics, Turrio laments, “respond to almost all things—places, persons, and actions—with displeasure, and thus turn to novel things.”¹³⁶ Another common feature of melancholics easily taken advantage of by demons, Turrio continues, is their proneness to fall into ecstatic trances, under the force of which they sometimes make accurate predictions and speak foreign languages without formal instruction. “If there is a demon effecting these things,” Turrio acknowledges, “it must be considered to operate especially in those who are most easily disposed to extreme fits of frenzy and insanity, and to becoming fanatics.” Included by Turrio in this group are the ancient Pythian oracles and sibyls. But having thus gone to great lengths to point up the demonically serviceable potential of melancholy, Turrio also lets it be known that, when moderately enkindled, melancholy is able to help lift the soul to the “highest causes” (*altissimas causas*). And how, we ask, are we to make sure that our melancholy is to maintain its upward course? Turrio’s answer is that it must have the effect of consolidating rather than dispersing images of the mind. That is to say, Turrio counsels, the application of mind provoked by such melancholy should be “both prompt and intent, but not distracted.”¹³⁷

The question remains of how this analysis of the philosophical act can also be applied to the poetic act as earlier expounded by Navagero. The answer to this question, with Turrio’s more speculative approach to the subject to further enlighten us, is discovered in the common model shared by philosophers and poets alike: the ancient oracles. Declaring divination to be a kind of frenzy (*furor*), Turrio also accepts that “melancholy is truly apt in effecting this frenzy.”¹³⁸ For this reason, Turrio asserts, “melancholics are better able to excel in all their predictions.”¹³⁹

This is not to say, Turrio allows, that melancholy cannot also contribute to what is really only a series of lucky guesses on the part of diviner. Another result of its impact on the mind, however, pro-

¹³⁶ Fracastoro, *Turrius*, lib. II, in *Opera omnia*, fol. 144^r. Cf. *De sympathia et antipathia rerum*, cap. 18, in *Opera omnia*, fol. 72^r.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 145^r.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 146^r.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 145^r. On the notion of prophetic genius in Fracastoro see Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 127 ff.

viding a far more reliable guide to the future, is its ability to facilitate the soul's temporary severance from its corporeal encumbrances so that it can apprehend the present, past, and future with equal lucidity. Accordingly, Turrio explains, "in whatever manner that it may happen for a man to become a prophet, either as a result of chance or by the undertaking of the separated intellect, melancholy seems to be most apt in being of service to it."¹⁴⁰

Admittedly, Fracastoro concedes to the theologians, the uplifting functions of melancholy are capable of being diabolically subverted, in which case, instead of raising the soul to the "highest causes" and endowing it with rare visionary powers, it provokes those in whom it prevails to become "completely insane, and turned into fanatics."¹⁴¹ In typical Ficinian fashion Fracastoro's Turrio does not consider the contrary possibilities inhering in melancholy to be contradictory to one another, since both are referable beyond natural causes to supernatural ones. For Fracastoro as for others of his day joining in the vogue of melancholy genius popularized by Ficino, the aping abilities of demons, while finding in melancholy a serviceable agent, originated in the same supermaterial realm as did the genuine ecstatic and prophetic abilities proceeding from God.

For the purpose of divining "what is still to come and far removed from ourselves," Turrio declaims in support of this position, neither melancholy nor any other disposition of the body is capable of naturally (*naturaliter*) imparting to us the necessary knowledge, "unless perhaps by chance and a certain act of fortune." If we are to achieve absolute certainty in our predictions as distinct from mere probability, Turrio reasons, we need access to a source of knowledge exceeding the bounds of nature; "if it is by the power of divination that this occurs and not by chance," he contends, "there is necessary some separated intellect, either divine, or angelic, or demonic, to invest us with that divination."¹⁴²

The potentially salutary effect of melancholy on genius, Fracastoro exclaimed through his spokesman Turrio, is attested not only by individuals, but also by nations. Among individuals even very young boys displaying a melancholy countenance are often observed to possess "extraordinarily vigorous minds." And among the nations notable

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 146^r.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

for the presence of many melancholics among their citizens, “above all the Greeks, the Italians, and the Spanish . . . appear to excel others in the sciences, arts, governmental matters, and in the administration of the state.”¹⁴³ As to how melancholy is able to exert this favorable effect on the human mind, Fracastoro answered in the expected way that its secret lies in its ability, when heated to the proper degree, to help detach the mind from discrete particulars and move it to the plane of universals. The two areas of genial expression that most directly engaged his interest in this regard—as it happened, a vested interest, since he demonstrated expertise in both fields—are poetry and philosophy, the express subjects of his two companion dialogues. His object in the *Naugerius* and *Turrius* was to demonstrate not only that philosophical and poetic genius share combined traits of divine frenzy and melancholy with one another, but also how they modally differ from one another in the ways they assimilate and exhibit those traits.

Those spurred by a proper measure of inflamed melancholy, we are told by Turrio, “at first accurately apprehend and preserve pure sensible forms, following which they promptly, though in a regulated manner, thoroughly weigh and distinguish related matters in the sub-notions;” in this way, he explains, they “manage to construct, to represent, and to judge to the highest degree possible in matters not only which are public, but also in those which are hidden and private.” Accordingly, he continues, melancholics better than other humoral types “are able to abstract and to induce universals, and to remember them, reasoning and distinguishing, with probity and subtlety, between what is true, what is false, what is probable, what is necessary, and what it requires to seek out and observe the highest causes.”¹⁴⁴

Evidenced by his choice of a frenzied poet and a morose philosopher to present his views, then, Fracastoro’s interest in this topic did not lie so much in the constituents of mystical and prophetic alienation *per se* as in the constituents of philosophical and poetic genius which he deemed to find in mystical and prophetic alienation fitting analogues. These notions in turn hinged on a generic concept of genius that could diverge into a variety of forms. “If it is true that God or an angel mingles with us,” Fracastoro theorized in this more

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, fol. 145^r.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

general meaning of his inquiry, "it is reasonable to assume that he especially mingles with those who, by the magnitude of their genius and by a certain excellence of their actions, are superior to us."¹⁴⁵ As recognized earlier by Ficino and now recertified by Fracastoro, a foremost natural sign that one is so blessed with genius is the melancholy complexion.

The basic role of the philosopher, illustrated by Turrio, is to pursue knowledge of hidden and unknown reality, whereas the basic role of poet, illustrated by Navagero, is to perceive ideal forms of beauty within which that reality is immersed and to communicate these forms through the act of imitation. Poets and philosophers, declares Turrio, "differ in this: they who are more of the nature of a philosopher than of a poet are more insistent on, and take pleasure in, inquiring into causes, whereas those who are more in the nature of poets than philosophers are more captivated by beautiful things, love to imitate and explicate them, and moreover cannot suffer anything of beauty or ornament to be absent from things." Put more succinctly, "philosophers are born more for knowing, and less for imitating, but poets more for imitating."¹⁴⁶ Underlying these modal differences between poetic and philosophical genius, however, as voiced by Turrio, are two substantive traits shared between them in their respective quests of truth and beauty. The first is an externally arousing divine frenzy, and the second, an internally arousing melancholy humor.

Being "reflective and taciturn by nature" and of a disposition "to inquire into occult causes," Turrio can testify from personal experience, the melancholic is often found to be engaged in profound philosophical speculation. Fracastoro's object here, however, a closer reading shows, was less to contrast the philosophical and poetic functions than to underscore a key element they hold in common. For poets in comparison to philosophers, Fracastoro had Turrio continue, "are very near to these in the powers of their mind, and are widely held to resemble them in their genius." And if philosophy can be said to validate this deep-seated kinship of philosophy and poetry, declares Turrio, history confirms it, as divulged by the observation that in past times "many among the poets were also great philosophers, and just as many among the philosophers were at the

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 148^r.

same time poets."¹⁴⁷ Having thus started out with the object of distinguishing the poetic and philosophical functions, Fracastoro ended in highlighting their common ground. Implicitly embedded into this common ground, in keeping with the literary, artistic, and philosophical vogue fomented by the Florentine Platonic revival, is the melding of the Platonic doctrine of divine inspiration with the Aristotelian doctrine of genial melancholy.

Following Fracastoro's effort to maintain some kind of equilibrium between the natural and supernatural requirements of genial aspiration were two further ones by Antonio Persio and Giordano Bruno that reflected revolutionary currents of thought and attitude coming into fashion after Fracastoro's death. A key factor in the genial theories of both of Persio and Bruno was their attraction to the novel philosophical system forged by the Neapolitan Bernardino Telesio, who, as earlier pointed out, challenged the traditional Platonic and Aristotelian systems in two basic ways: first, by replacing the teleological underpinning of traditional cosmic hierarchy with contrasting principles of heat and cold that finds no resting place, and, second, by replacing a premise that sense experience is eventually to give way to sense-free ideas with one finding sense experience as fully at the divine apex of spiritual ascent as at its bestial nadir.¹⁴⁸ Whereas, in this regard, Persio's genial theory constituted a more modest attempt to apply Telesio's metaphysical insights to psychology, Bruno's genial theory issued out of a far more ambitiously comprehensive philosophical program that amalgamated Telesian metaphysics with Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical principles, Hermetic magical principles, Copernican heliocentrism, and Lucretian atomism, the consolidated effect of which was to overthrow the inherited hierar-

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* On the basis of a 1551 epistle Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 272, has positioned Fracastoro among the anti-Platonists of the Renaissance, "who felt it necessary to defend the art against the charge of madness and irresponsibility." The relevant letter, to Girolamo Amalteo, dated Verona, May 1, 1551, is found in *Raccolta d'Opuscoli scientifici, e filologici*, ed. Calogerà, Vol. II (Venice: Lane, 1729), 261–66. Yet Fracastoro's protest in this letter against the popular opinion that poetic inspiration is a madness (*pazzia*) was not likely a protest against the Platonic inspiration theory as such, but merely a protest against the tendency to confuse inspired frenzy with clinical insanity. If it is true, as Weinberg holds, that Fracastoro sought to endow poetry with the same "disciplined intellectual activity" which he assigned to philosophy, it is equally true, as here demonstrated, that he held the philosophical act likewise to hinge on a kind of alienated "frenzy" and to exhibit corresponding natural symptoms in the form of melancholy.

¹⁴⁸ See above, p. 245.

chical world view. In both cases, as will now be examined at closer hand, the Ficinian genial theory aptly demonstrated its ability to adapt as readily to novel ways of thinking about the world as to the traditional ways conditioning the original formulations of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical systems.

* * *

Resonating with a characteristic theme of the Renaissance Platonic revival, Antonio Persio (1542–1612), in his *Trattato dell'ingegno* (1576), detected at the heart of the genial function the yearning of love. “Genius and love,” Persio declared, “share reciprocal causes with one another,” for which reason, he exulted, not only do ingenious men make better lovers, but also, conversely, “love makes a man ingenious.”¹⁴⁹ Among the “reciprocal causes” shared by genius and love, Persio further attested, is melancholy, for which reason ingenious lovers are nearly always melancholy, confirmed by Aristotle when he queried “why men of great genius are usually inclined to melancholy,” and again by Cicero when he declared “that he could not be very ingenious who was not also a bit melancholic.”¹⁵⁰ Of the kinds of mental activity viewed by Persio as attesting to the love-melancholy-genius nexus, one of the more prominent is poetic invention, the reason being, he offered, that the spirit of the amatory genius “is refined and quickened in perceiving the proportion of a beautiful form.”¹⁵¹

Quintessentially personifying this principle for Persio was *il Petrarca ingegnoso*, who was reported to have had love summoned and acquitted before the tribunal of reason.¹⁵² The lesson drawn from this trial of love by Persio, as by his enamored exemplar Petrarca, is that, “being beneficial to the acumen of our genius, and conferring that benefit upon us, love causes us to ascend into a state of ecstasy, which is a guide for us to the beloved object.” Though initiated by the perception of a physical form (in the poet’s own case that of his beloved Laura), according to Persio, Petrarca’s amorous ascent did

¹⁴⁹ Antonio Persio, *Trattato dell'ingegno dell'huomo* (Venice: Aldo Manutio, 1576), pp. 109, 117. On Persio’s Telesian principles see Walker, *Magic*, pp. 195 ff., and Garin, *Cultura Filosofica*, pp. 432 ff., with this tract treated, pp. 436 ff.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 114. In the usual manner of those invoking Cicero on behalf of the Aristotelian genial doctrine, Persio lifted his quotation out of context, thereby reversing the import of its sarcastic intention.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

not stop with worldly beauty, moving from there to the supremely beautiful form of God. "Because He is the highest good," declared Persio in this vein, the divine Creator "is adored, revered, and loved, and because His highest beauty moves our appetites to love Him beyond measure (*sopra misura*), He lives within us."¹⁵³ A direct result of this inordinate passion on the part of *il Petrarca ingegnoso*, Persio observed, was his surrender to the painful affliction he called his *accidia* and the physicians call melancholy.

In the foregoing exposition of the ingenuity of love there is no indication that Persio felt a need to break out of the Platonic mold bequeathed to him by Ficino. A fuller assessment of his genial theory, however, reveals that, even as he came to essentially the same conclusions about the origin and nature of genius as the Platonists, Persio approached the question within a metaphysical context supplied to him, not by the ancients through Ficinian mediation as we might expect, but by his contemporary Telesio.¹⁵⁴ If one feature of the Telesian system can be singled out as most directly touching on Persio's genial doctrine, it is the replacement of the four elements of the traditional cosmic hierarchy—earth, water, fire, and air—with contrasting principles of heat and cold no longer readily contained within a pre-established hierarchical framework.

As gleaned by Persio from the Aristotelian legacy, melancholic ingenuity in the lover depends on its attendant humor becoming properly enkindled, a feature, it so happened, to which the novel Telesian metaphysical system was as conducive as the longstanding Peripatetic one. "God does not perform here below unless through the hot," asserted Persio in keeping with his Telesian principles, "from which proceeds movement."¹⁵⁵ On this subject, then, Persio found Aristotle and Telesio to be perfectly compatible, openly endorsing from his Telesian point of view the pronouncement of pseudo-Aristotle "that while he who is burdened by a superabundance of cold and black bile is boorish and lazy, he who will have this sufficiently hot, so that it foment the spirit, will be most ingenious and amorous."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–24.

¹⁵⁴ Besides drawing on Telesio's ideas, Persio also edited his writings. See, e.g., *Bernardini Telesii Consentini, Varii de naturalibus rebus libelli, ab Antonio Persio editi* (Venice: Apud Felicem Valgrisium, 1590).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Much as the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical legacies demonstrated adaptability to Persio's Telesian precepts, so did the Hermetic alchemical legacy. "Just as the fire which inflames and refines gold renders it more resplendent and more rubicund," wrote Persio, "in the same way does genius (*lo'ngegnoso*), either by natural heat or by movements of the enkindled mind, become reddened, hot, and luminous." It followed for Persio from the application of the alchemical metaphor to his subject that "the color of the genius, especially at the commencement of his studies, ought to be that of gold," for which reason "he who wishes to achieve the acquisition of the most pure gold of wisdom possesses the complexion of gold, which has been created by the sun and by its nature is the most noble and perfect in comparison to every other metal."¹⁵⁷ The psychological consequence of melancholic inflammation was summarized by Persio in the proclamation, ascribed to Galen but in truth owing more to Telesian metaphysics, that "all the things which instill coldness are injurious to our memory and intellect, because the cold is the contrary of the hot, and from the hot is born the spirit, and from the spirit is born genius (*ingegno*)."¹⁵⁸

Enlarging on the cold-hot polarity basic to the Telesian system, Persio acknowledged that, when left in its original cold form, melancholy displays debilitating symptoms not very different from those of cold and moist phlegm; for this reason, he cautioned, an excess of cold melancholy as surely as an excess of cold phlegm "first bears injury against the spirit, then against the genius."¹⁵⁹ Granting that, under the influence of the naturally cold form of their humor, "melancholics are perceived much of the time to be full of fear and sorrow," Persio explained that this is because "the spirit, having become less in quantity and less hot by the agitation, is able neither to increase nor to expand, nor to come outside; thus it remains locked in a state of spitefulness, of fearful obscurity, and of complaint." In this way a kind of freezing of the brain occurs, giving melancholics, having been cast into a state of physical quiescence "by the continuous contemplation to which their minds are directed," the appearance of being but half-alive. What fundamentally distinguished melancholy from its phlegmatic look-alike for Persio, however, making

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

it pertinent also to the second half of his cold-hot polarity, is its inherent combustability. For with the the application of fire to the melancholy of the previously frigid contemplative, Persio determined, the situation is drastically changed and melancholics now are observed to be “vivacious, strong, courageous, and exuberant.”¹⁶⁰

While accepting the astrological proposition that remote planetary influences, such as those emitting from Saturn and Mercury, can also play a part in the fomentation of melancholy genius, Persio’s focus was directed to its proximate causes. “To attain to the high and sublime sciences,” Persio maintained, “it is necessary to have the spirit gathered unto itself, which becomes agitated, and being agitated is dissolved, and being dissolved has the power (*forza*) to refresh and reinvigorate itself from the more subtle part of the blood.”¹⁶¹ In the process, he speculated, there is established a dynamic give-and-take between the opposing principles of recollection and dissolution, with heat acting as a vital mediator in their reciprocal actions and reactions. An important source of such heat as is brought to bear on the human psyche, Persio decided with help from Aristotle, is a moderately adust form of the melancholy humor.

This, Persio concluded, is the meaning lying not only behind Aristotle’s celebrated paradoxical maxim that “the ingenious are sometimes deemed to be mad,” but also behind a maxim famously ascribed to Aristotle’s philosophical predecessor Heraclitus proclaiming, along the same lines, that “a dry light makes a wise mind” (*lux sicca, anima sapiens*), with the hot dryness of the melancholy humor presumed to help ready the soul for the reception of divine illumination. With these ancient philosophical sapientes, contended Persio, we too can conclude that “there has never been a great genius who has not been touched by a bit of madness or frenzy.”¹⁶² What Persio significantly added to this commonplace, following the strategem adopted by Ficino, is the identification of an Aristotelian-based doctrine of melancholy genius with a Platonic-based doctrine of love frenzy, construed in his mind as an amorous desire instilled in the genial mind to be united with the beauteous form of God. What distinguished Persio’s from Ficino’s genial theory is its presentation within a the post-Ficinian metaphysical framework of Telesio.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Another thinker of the late cinquecento to fall under the sway of the Telesian metaphysical outlook was the renegade Dominican Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). What distinguishes this itinerant free spirit of his age from all the foregoing thinkers, however, is that, while assimilating ideas from many philosophical schools, including that of Telesio, he refused to be captive to any school in particular. The result was a synthesis of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Telesian philosophical principles; the Copernican heliocentric theory; the concept of an infinitely extending universe bequeathed by the ancient Democritean school; Cusanus' doctrines of the *coincidentia oppositorum* and its epistemological correlate, *docta ignorantia*; and the Hermetic arcana. Symbolizing in his restless personal life—and fiery death as a martyr to philosophy—a principle that was also a distinctive mark of his rapturous speculations, Bruno declared the melancholy love of knowledge, like the universe to which it corresponds, to know no finite bounds and therefore to find no final resting place.

The idea that, more than any other, can be said to have joined Persio and Bruno in a common enterprise was that encapsulated by Persio in his declaration that “love makes a man ingenious”—a thesis given extensive further treatment by Bruno in his most famous writing, his *De gli eroici furori*. Also like Persio, Bruno found that, even as he did his best to claim independence from Aristotle, whom he viewed as a philosophical weight on a soul born to pursue an infinite goal, he still retained a place in his thinking for an Aristotelian-based doctrine of melancholy genius that, as he saw it, had the capability of assisting the soul's amatory drive to cast off its finite fetters. To this end Bruno borrowed not only Ficino's notion of a sublimated “heroic love” as the mark of true genius, but also Ficino's notion of “heroic melancholy,” which melded with the love theme in a new cosmic context. Corresponding to the infinity of the universe, surmised Bruno, is the infinitely yearning aspiration of love. If melancholy should result from such infinite passion, Bruno confessed, this is but the price the heroic genius must be prepared to pay for his perpetual pursuit of an infinitely removed divine object.

While, admittedly, there is nothing in his concept of the heroic love that is novel in and of itself, Bruno blended the strands of the traditional love motif in a highly innovative way. As such it corresponds to innovative changes in cosmic science where, in corresponding fashion, the Copernican heliocentric theory removed the spheric barriers separating the terrestrial from the celestial realms.

Philosophically fortified by his reading of Cusanus and Telesio in association with Ficino, Bruno not only played a key role in popularizing the Copernican heliocentric theory, but also went a crucial further step by extending the Copernican theory into a thoroughgoing vision of an infinite universe. In this connection Bruno's heroic lover can be construed as a psychological counterpart to the infinite universe, a microcosm discontentedly contained in the finite world and, in response, amorously aspiring to the macrocosmically infinite.¹⁶³

Bruno's shift of emphasis from Ficino's doctrine of amorous yearning for God, in association with the cosmological shift from a closed to an open universe, in effect resulted in a change in kind. For whereas Ficino still had essentially accepted the medieval teleological premise, underscored by its dominant Aristotelianism, that the soul will eventually come to rest in God, Bruno, reinforced by the Telesian opposition of heat and cold in perpetual oscillation, was no longer convinced in that happy outcome of the heroic quest. Bruno's heroic lover, having rejected Aristotle's rule of the golden mean, also necessarily rejects a concept of the universe that will allow him to find rest in a middle traditionally held by the Aristotelians to lie between extremes. Though his own sundry forays into this subject appear to have more in common with the enraptured trances of the mystics than with the more reasoned ruminations we might expect of a trained philosophical mind, we will here seek to demonstrate that beneath Bruno's seemingly disorganized approach to the subject of human genius exists an underlying consistency of thought and purpose.

* * *

"He who has become heroically frenzied," exults Bruno's Tansillo in the *Eroici furori*, "in effect raises himself, through his conception of the species of divine beauty and goodness and with the wings of

¹⁶³ See, e.g., Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being*, p. 116: "... it is Giordano Bruno who must be regarded as the principal representative of the doctrine of the decentralized, infinite, and infinitely populous universe; for he not only preached it throughout Western Europe with the fervor of an evangelist, but also first gave a thorough statement of the grounds on which it was to gain acceptance from the general public." Cf. Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, pp. 187 ff.; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, p. 326; and Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), pp. 39 ff. The text of Bruno's *De l'infinito, universo e mondi* is found in his *Dialoghi Italiani: Dialoghi Metafisici e Dialoghi Morali*, ed. Giovanni Gentile; 3rd ed., Giovanni Aquilecchia (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), pp. 343 ff., trans. by Dorothea Waley Singer as *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, appended to her

the intellect and intellectual will, to the level of divinity, thereby shaking off the form of his baser creature."¹⁶⁴ In drawing out this concept Bruno followed Ficino in coalescing the Platonic concept of love frenzy with the medical concept of heroic love, a species of melancholy, and turning it to the genial needs of philosophers, poets, and the like—that is, of those who, while still incarcerated by their finite bodies, psychically aspire to reach the infinite. It is not by chance that, in reformulating this theme in accordance with the infinite cosmos that opened up before his mind's eyes, Bruno also paid homage to the solitary way of life that he continued to hold as a primary requisite of his melancholy ecstasies.

"The truth," proclaims another Bruno spokesman in the *Eroici furori*, Maricondo, "finds its dark and cavernous refuge in a thick, dense, and deserted solitary place, and there becomes entwined with thorns and covered with wooded, rough, and leafy plants."¹⁶⁵ For this reason, the same speaker elsewhere entreats, "the mind which aspires above first of all leaves care about the multitude behind."¹⁶⁶ It is therefore understandable, Bruno further observed in his *Sigillus sigillorum*, that Pythagoras spent a long period in solitude where he "rendered himself a great and veracious contemplator of the nature of things," and that Zoroaster passed an even longer period in solitary seclusion, where he became proficient "in all types of magic and divination." It is also understandable, Bruno testified on the safer ground of biblical authority, that Moses out-performed the magicians of Pharaoh with his miracles in a remote and deserted place, and that Jesus chose comparably desolate surroundings for the stupendous display of his miracles before Satan.¹⁶⁷

Giordano Bruno: His Life and Thought (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), pp. 224 ff. (based on the Venice ed., 1584). The internal relationship between Bruno's cosmic and psychological outlooks is indicated by a passing reference to the *De l'infinito* in his *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 5, in *Dialoghi*, p. 1045.

¹⁶⁴ Bruno, *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 3, in *Dialoghi*, pp. 1003–1004. For a synopsis of this work see Paul Eugene Memmo, Jr., ed., trans. *Giordano Bruno's 'The Heroic Frenzies': A translation with Introduction and Notes* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1964), intro., pp. 17–19. Cf. Nelson, *Renaissance theory of Love*, esp. ch. 3, pp. 163 ff.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, part. II, dial. 2, p. 1121.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, part. II, dial. 1, in *Dialoghi italiani*, p. 1086.

¹⁶⁷ Bruno, *Sigillus sigillorum, ad omnes animi dispositiones comparandas habitusque perficiendos accommodatus*, no. 35, in *Opera latine conscripta*, ed. F. Tocco and H. Vitelli, 3 vols. (Florence: Typis Successorum Le Monnier, 1891), II, 180. On Bruno's treatment of Moses and Jesus as magi see Yates, *Bruno*, pp. 353–54, and Fulvio Papi, *Antropologia e Civiltà nel Pensiero di Giordano Bruno* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968), pp. 133–34.

In putting the names of suspect ancient marvel-workers like Zoroaster and Pythagoras in close proximity to those of Moses and Jesus, Bruno was obviously entering dangerous territory that, as time revealed, was to play a key part in his burning at the stake on the Roman Campo dei Fiori in 1600. Yet in doing so, Bruno was not really breaking new ground, since a prior tradition had already been well established, with Ficino included in its ranks, justifying a certain kind of magic as compatible with official church doctrine. In keeping with this occult legacy Bruno conceived of the personage infused by divine frenzy to be a kind of miracle-working magician who, being no longer content with the the confining limitations of the civic virtues, is impelled to seek out a solitary retreat where he may break through those limitations to a higher truth.

As perceived by his critics, Bruno was a wicked heretic whose theological errors arose out of his own secret fraternization with demons. From Bruno's own point of view, on the other hand, the only "demon" with which he consorted was that identified in Ficino's *De amore* with divine love, signified in the declaration concluding his *Theses de magia* and finding extensive amplification in his *Eroici furori*, that "love is called by the Platonists a great Demon."¹⁶⁸ Determining that the universe could no longer be contained by finite boundaries, Bruno extended the same reasoning to the human mind, which he deemed to be vested with an inborn amatory drive—a *magia amoris*—capable of bursting the bonds of its finite constraints.

Following this line of reasoning, Bruno considered the prophetic act itself to be a kind of magic. "Magicians," Bruno wrote in his *De magia*, "are said to be all those who are equipped to divine, by whatever reckoning, absent and future things."¹⁶⁹ The extrasensory seeing attributed to these, Bruno determined, is but the prelude to prodigious doing, the effect of which, in Bruno's mind, was to so blur the inherited Christian distinction between miracle and magic as to make them essentially identical. As Tansillo puts this principle in succinct form in the *Eroici furori*, love "illuminates, clarifies, and opens the intellect, making it capable of penetrating to the truth of all things and to provoke miraculous effects."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Bruno, *Theses de magia*, no. 56, in *Opera*, III, p. 491. On Bruno's magic see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 423–28, and Yates, *Bruno*, pp. 190 ff.

¹⁶⁹ Bruno, *De magia*, in *Opera*, III, 399.

¹⁷⁰ Bruno, *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 1, in *Dialoghi*, p. 969.

This is not to say, of course, that in making his case for Christian magic Bruno was not also keenly aware of its potential corruption by demons. For as he well understood, the dark underbelly of favorable genius is its socratic counterpart. Indeed, like Ficino earlier, he viewed his own magic as an apt antidote to the demonic kind. An indispensable proviso of course, assuring that such magical medicine would be geared to overcoming demons rather than becoming subject to them, is that it be performed under the strict guidance of Christian piety. As Bruno put this proposition in the *De magia*: "All practitioners (*operatores*), whether they be magicians, physicians, or prophets, succeed in effecting nothing without prior faith; with prior faith added, however, they effect numerous [marvels]."¹⁷¹

Also like Ficino, Bruno emphasized a particular aspect of magic, namely, its incantational musical mode, as being particularly efficacious in ridding the soul of demonic influence. "Music," Bruno wrote with the illustrious biblical example of David's melodious cure of Saul to illustrate his point, "cheers us, either by making an impression or stirring up a spirit contrary to those spirits which arise from melancholy or the black bile."¹⁷² The soothing strains of music, Bruno agreed with a widely prescribed exorcistical remedy, constitute a foremost purgative medium for expunging from the soul, together with discordant melancholy, the discordant demons attracted to melancholy.

Nevertheless, with the additional philosophical visions of Nicholas Cusanus and Telesio to help guide him in tandem with that of Ficino, Bruno found a way to put melancholy to favorable divine as well as to unfavorable demonic usage. "Profound magic," exclaimed Bruno under the simultaneous force of Telesio's metaphysics of contraries and Cusanus' doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, "is knowledge, after having found the point of their union, of how to traverse

¹⁷¹ *De magia*, in *Opera*, III, 452. On this passage see Papi, *Anthropologia*, p. 128.

¹⁷² *Theses de magia*, no. 39, in *Opera*, III, 478. For further examples of Bruno's demonological beliefs see *De magia*, in *Opera*, III, 397-400. Tract recently repub. and trans. into Italian, together with *De vinculis in genere*, by Albano Biondi (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1986). Characterizing Bruno's own occult theory as "demonomagic" is Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 156 ff., thereby blurring a theoretical distinction in his case, as in Ficino's before him, between illicit demonic magic and licit "spiritual" magic. For post-Ficinian testaments to the curative powers of music see Armen Carapetyan, "Music and Medicine in the Renaissance and in the 17th and 18th centuries," in Dorothy M. Schullian and Max Schoen, eds. *Music and Medicine* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1948), pp. 117 ff.

contraries."¹⁷³ In parallel fashion Bruno conceived of the melancholy lover as being divinely equipped to traverse the lack of proportion that Cusanus had thrown up between the finite and infinite realms. One so infused with the rays of divine love, as put by Bruno in his *Spaccio del la bestia trionfante*, is able to attain to "that wisdom and judgment, that art, industry, and use of the intellectual light (*de lume intellettuale*) which becomes revealed to the world, sometimes more and sometimes less, and sometimes maximally and sometimes minimally."¹⁷⁴

Melancholy of this kind, insisted Bruno, far from being demonically prompted as its opponents charged, is prompted rather by a desire to overcome the demons. While pointing permissible magic to a supernatural apex, Bruno located its base in the material world; "so far as it is directed to supernatural principles, it is divine," he declared in the *Spaccio*, "and so far as it is directed to the contemplation of nature and to the thoroughgoing scrutiny of its secrets, it is natural."¹⁷⁵ In corresponding fashion, Bruno saw the frenzy of love as finding a natural base in an enkindled melancholy humor. "Nature is nothing other than God working in things," as Bruno put this principle in its most general terms.¹⁷⁶ Or as he put the same idea in another writing, this time relayed through the mouth of an ass: "We are unable to arrive at the causes (*raggiomi*) of supernatural things except so far as they shine forth in natural things; for it does not fall to any other but a purified and superior intellect to consider them in themselves (*in sé*)."¹⁷⁷ Despite his decidedly anti-Peripatetic philosophical stance in other matters, a significant consequence of Bruno's radical naturalization of Platonic theory was the reappointment of melancholy as an a natural agent of the frenzies in terms resembling those set forth by pseudo-Aristotle in the *Problemata* and restated by Ficino as a cornerstone of his reformulated genial theory.

¹⁷³ Bruno, *De la causa, principio e uno*, dial. 5, in *Dialoghi italiani*, p. 340. Cf. Cusanus' comparable influence on the magical vision of Della Riviera, indicated above, pp. 287–88.

¹⁷⁴ Bruno, *Spaccio del la bestia trionfante*, dial. 3, in *Dialoghi*, pp. 781–82. English trans.: Arthur D. Imerti, ed., trans. *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1964). On Bruno's resonance with the ideas of Cusanus see esp. Cassirer, *Individual and Cosmos*, p. 46 and passim. The speaker is Tansillo, likewise employed as Bruno's spokesman in the *Eroici furori*.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 782.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 776.

¹⁷⁷ Bruno, *L'asino cillenico del Nolano*, in *Dialoghi*, p. 917. On this passage see also Yates, *Bruno*, p. 260.

Such melancholy was not for Bruno, as it was a century earlier, for example, for Alberti, merely a reluctantly suffered consequence of the scholarly life. On the contrary, Bruno viewed melancholy as an actively dynamic aid to the heroic will, in his mind the humoral correlative of natural magic. Viewed in this light, reinforced by the philosophical vision bequeathed to Bruno by Cusanus and Telesio, natural melancholy stood to the human microcosm for Bruno as natural magic stood to the macrocosm—a terrestrially based collaborator of the heroic will's divinely instilled drive, on the wings of the divine frenzies, to traverse the rationally insurmountable gulf separating the finite from the infinite realm of existence.

Whereas Ficino had envisaged the restlessness of love melancholy as becoming eventually stilled once the enamored soul had become united with its divine object, Bruno, under the additional aegis of Cusanus and Telesio, rejected that quiescent outcome. In Bruno's rendition the heroic lover, instead of reaching his amorous object and finding a measure of rest thereby, rather aspires to a beloved object "where there is no end."¹⁷⁸ Or as the same point is made another way by Bruno's Tansillo, heroic love, "leaving the mean and the middle way of temperance, tends first to one extreme and then to the other."¹⁷⁹

As this feature of Bruno's genial theory is further expatiated, the soul of the heroic lover "runs to where it cannot arrive, extends itself to that which it cannot reach, and seeks to embrace that which it cannot contain, and even as he becomes vainly separated from that beloved object to which he is aspiring, he continues all the more, without letup, to chase with fiery avidity after the infinite." For Bruno "it is only suitable and to be expected that the infinite, by virtue of being infinite, is to be infinitely pursued."¹⁸⁰ The goal of heroic aspiration for Bruno was not eternal rest as for the Aristotelianized scholastics—and, as it happens, for Ficino who philosophized on the basis of the same premise, but rather eternal motion. In a world envisaged as a continuous ebb and flow between opposites without a final resting place, Bruno saw no reason to expect ultimate rest among the passions any more than among the perpetual alternations and oscillations of the universe at large. If a natural consequence of

¹⁷⁸ *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 3, in *Dialoghi*, p. 997.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 2, in *Dialoghi*, p. 980.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 4, pp. 1011–12.

the heroic soul's amatory restlessness is a similarly perpetual condition termed by Bruno's Tansillo "this melancholic and perverse humor" (*questo malencolico e perverso umore*),¹⁸¹ such, deemed Bruno, is the earthly price that the heroic lover is compelled to pay for the privilege of being allowed to exceed finite limits.

All things in the world, declares Bruno's spokesman Tansillo in the *Eroici furori*, "consist of contraries" (*constano de contrarij*), so that, as everyday experience instructs us, "the end of one contrary is the beginning of another, and the extreme of one thing is the commencement of its opposite."¹⁸² The human mind, Bruno determined, is no exception to the cosmic law of contraries. In this way Bruno can be said to have appropriated a basic notion of the Cusan philosophy, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, and invested it with a specialized psychological meaning of his own. Extending this concept to the entire range of opposites experienced in the course of living—pleasure and sorrow, love and death, vice and virtue, an abstract love of beautiful forms and the sensual love of the body, mystical intuition and philosophical intellectualization, and, inexorably interwoven with these, vicious melancholy incited by demons and virtuous melancholy incited by God, Bruno depicted the heroic mind as the consummating nexus of anguishing contraries that, in diminished form, is latently present within us all.

A good starting point for the illustration of Bruno's reconstructed genial theory is his treatment of the pleasure-sorrow opposition capsulized by Tansillo's proclamation in the *Eroici furori* that "one is afflicted by the pleasure which consumes him, is made happy in the midst of anguish, and is tormented in the midst of all his contentments." Corresponding to the contraries inherent in the universe at large, the human psyche consisted for Bruno of a coupling of passionate contraries, so that, according to Tansillo, "there is no pleasure of generation on one side without a corresponding displeasure of corruption on the other. And where these things which are generated and corrupted are conjoined and arranged together in the same subject, there are found together the feelings of pleasure and sorrow." Encapsulating the dynamic union of these contrary psychic forces for Bruno was a motto that he took as his own: "In sorrow, joy, and in joy, sorrow" (*In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis*).¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 4, in *Dialoghi*, p. 1020.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 2, pp. 974, 976.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, part. II, dial. 1, pp. 1079–80. So central is this motto to Bruno's out-

Just as the amorously inclined human psyche mirrored the coincidence of opposites for Bruno, so did the melancholy humor impact on that psyche. Taking note, in his *De vinculis in genere*, of the paradox that melancholy often results from an overweening aspiration to achieve the opposite of pleasure, Bruno explained that melancholics, being more impressionable than most men, "more intensely imagine pleasure" (*fortius voluptatem imaginantur*.)" But once an imagined pleasure is denied them, Bruno further surmised, melancholics succumb to the contrary passion—to what he here terms an invisible "tie" (*vinculum*)—of indignation and sorrow.¹⁸⁴ Assisting Bruno with poetic language and imagery for his visualization of a psychic "coincidence of opposites" was the poetic tradition of stilnovism, attested by Tansillo's pronouncement in the *Eroici furori*, with Petrarca one of its more notable exemplars, that the heroic lover is condemned to a kind of living death.

Explains Tansillo: "He is deprived of death, because he gives birth to his meditations on his object, but is also deprived of life, because he does not grow or feel within himself."¹⁸⁵ Invoking an image commonly favored by the stilnovist poets, Bruno likened the heroic lover to a moth incinerated by the very flame to which it is inexorably drawn. Love was for Bruno, as for his stilnovist precursors, "an amorous fire" (*l'amoroso foco*), the effect of which is to purify the lover as it draws him into its deathly flames.¹⁸⁶ One under the spell of heroic love, Bruno averred, "is guided by a most sensitive and all too obvious frenzy (*furor*), which causes him to love that fire more than any refreshment, that wound more than any health, and those bonds more than any liberty."¹⁸⁷

If stilnovism furnished Bruno with one rich storehouse of literary images pertinent to his amorously enflamed hero, the ancient Greek myths furnished him with another rich storehouse. A myth he found

look that Erminio Troilio has employed it as the title of his anthology of Bruno's writings, *In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis* (Rome: A.F. Formiggini, 1922).

¹⁸⁴ Bruno, *De vinculis*, ed. Biondi, xvii, pp. 162–63. For this passage see also Massimo Ciavolella, "Saturn and Venus," in Ciavolella and Iannucci, eds. *Saturn*, p. 179. Giving special emphasis to this writing, "whose importance in the history of ideas," he contends, "far outstrips that of more famous ones," is Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, p. 89.

¹⁸⁵ *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 2, in *Dialoghi*, pp. 980–81. On Petrarca's key part in portraying these sentiments see, e.g., *Eroici furori*, pref., in *Dialoghi Italiani*, p. 935, where Bruno refers to "l'ingegno di quel toscano poeta, che si mostrò tanto spasi-mare alle rive di Sorgia per una di Valclusa, . . ."

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 5, pp. 1036–37.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 3, p. 990.

to be especially useful for his purposes was of the huntsman Actaeon who, on desecrating the nude form of a bathing Diana, was instantly transformed into a stag and became torn into pieces by his own hounds; while beginning his life as “a common and vulgar man,” Bruno reflected, Actaeon was eventually transformed into a man “rare and heroic” (*raro ed eroico*), that is, into one “who has rare customs and ideas, and leads an extraordinary life.”¹⁸⁸ Another ancient mythical prototype that Bruno found highly instructive for his purposes was of Icarus, who, against the advice of his father Daedalus, flew high into the heavens on waxen wings only to fall into the sea and drown after he approached too close to the hot sun.¹⁸⁹ Or as still another ancient myth served Bruno’s paradigmatic purposes: “Whatever kind of love it may be, it is always afflicted and tormented in such a way that it cannot fail to serve as material for Vulcan’s forge.”¹⁹⁰

A further application of the coincidence of opposites for Bruno lay in the two different literary genres in which he addressed his subject: philosophical speculation on one hand and mystical, prophetic, and poetic intuition on the other hand. Thus, while letting it be known that “love it is that moves and drives the intellect, preceding it as a lantern,” Bruno also affirmed in the same breath that “the operation of the intellect precedes the operation of the will.”¹⁹¹ The goal of all love, Bruno reaffirmed a basic premise of the stilnovist poets, is the unified fusion of absolute beauty and absolute truth, which begins its quest in the material world and concludes it in the realm of divine spirit. Translated into the genial theory received from Ficino, this signified for Bruno that an enkindled melancholy humor is able to begin the process of intellectual enlightenment in the heroic lover that is completed by divine frenzy, another name for what the mystics call divinely instilled ecstasy and what the prophets and poets call divinely received illuminations.

A significant rendering given by Bruno to the features of heroic love worked to the advantage of his philosophical propensities, inasmuch as melancholics, he noted in his *De vinculis*, “are more adapted than others to the demands of contemplation and speculation.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 4, p. 1008. Cf. part. II, dial. 2, p. 1125.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 3, p. 999.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 5, p. 1057.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 4, p. 1006.

¹⁹² Bruno, *De vinculis*, ed. Biondi, xvii, pp. 162–63.

Another rendering, moreover, worked equally well to the advantage of Bruno's poetic propensities, the inspiration of which he, like the bulk of Renaissance Platonists, found the better analogue in ecstatic trances and prophetic illuminations than in sober philosophical theorizing. "Poetry," Bruno had Tansillo proclaim under the sway of this outlook, "is not born from the rules, . . . but rules rather derive from poetry."¹⁹³ From Bruno's inspirational vantage point the codification of poetry's rules could only follow the act of composition, they could never precede them. To attempt such a feat made as much sense to Bruno as attempting to enclose infinity in a bottle.

It is not by chance, therefore, that the man whom Bruno chose to dedicate two of his major writings touching on this theme, the *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* and the *Eroici furori*, was the celebrated Elizabethan poet Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), the author of a *Defense of Poesie*, who likewise referred rare powers of poetic genius to the Platonic inspiration theory. For through the "magical" power of love, Bruno echoed Ficino, the variant forms of philosophical and poetic genius are mutually translatable into one another. That Bruno had a personal vested interest in poetry as in philosophy is demonstrated by the very construction of the *Eroici furori*, constituting as it does a series of metered sonnets on the subject of the love frenzy followed up by prose commentaries in dialogue form. In this connection, Bruno's verses reveal the same intimate conversance with the melancholic suffering shared by poet and philosopher which is also characteristic of his stilnovist precursors, invoking the image of the mountain sacred to the Muses, Parnassus, as a fitting symbol for his melancholic aspirations.

If divine frenzy can be said to have allowed for the bonding of philosophical and poetic genius in Bruno's mind, it can also be said to have allowed him to extend that bonding, in keeping with the famous Horatian adage *ut pictura poesis*, to embrace the visual arts. By having his chief spokesman Tansillo hold love to be initiated with seeing, he implied that he had accepted the argument of those making the transference from philosophical and poetic to artistic theory.¹⁹⁴ But if the visual apprehension of beauty triggered the beginning

¹⁹³ *Eroici furori*, parte I, dial. 1, in *Dialoghi*, pp. 958–59.

¹⁹⁴ In its new cosmic setting the aesthetic vision evidenced by Bruno reflected a crucial change in artistic styles, conventionally presented by the art historians under the labels Mannerism and Baroque, the leading practitioners of which, like Bruno, revealed an uncontained desire to break through finite limits to the infinite beyond.

of philosophy for Bruno, other means were furnished to the mind for arriving at its end. Above all the auditory faculty receptive to the art of music was viewed by Bruno as bearing the genial process to its zenith in whatever of its variant forms it might appear. As Bruno, on the heels of a reference to the Platonic inspiration theory, neatly summed up this genial common denominator in his *De compositione imaginum*: "True philosophy is music and poetry and painting (*pictura*); true painting, music and philosophy; and true poetry, music and divine wisdom and painting."¹⁹⁵

The paradox here, of course, applying as fully to Bruno as to Ficino before him, is that musical harmonies frequently prescribed by the physicians as a regimen for melancholy could simultaneously be construed as auditory affiliates of the divine frenzies in their reputed roles as heavenly sent instigators of melancholy. Bruno's resolution of this paradox, reinforced by the addition of Cusanus' notion of the coincidence of opposites and Telesio's notion of perpetual oscillation between the principles of heat and cold, was to portray the divine frenzy capable of thrusting the soul into discordantly melancholy disturbances at the inferior animal levels of existence as equally capable of harmoniously tranquillizing the soul at the superior spiritual levels. Where Bruno took radical departure from Ficino was in his view that, just as contraries like heat and cold are inseparable from one another at the highest as well as at the lowest stages of the heroic lover's drive to the infinite, so are the contraries of harmonizing supernatural frenzy and discordant natural melancholy.

In light of the foregoing analysis of love melancholy in Bruno, accordingly, we can better understand what he meant when, in the dedicatory preface to Sidney introducing the *Eroici furori*, he referred to the heroic lover, not with a sense of disdain but rather with one of pride, as "a man bound up in thought, afflicted, tormented, sad, and melancholic."¹⁹⁶ In the text following these words Bruno's Tansillo spells out at length the grounds for these symptoms. "The spirit affected by this frenzy," explains Tansillo, "is distracted by profound

See, e.g., Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M.D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1932), who established, among five basic concepts distinguishing "baroque" from "classic" art, "the development from closed to open form" (p. 15), corresponding to the opening out of the finite world into infinity.

¹⁹⁵ Bruno, *De compositione imaginum liber*, cap. 20, in *Opera latine conscripta*, p. 198.

¹⁹⁶ *Eroici furori*, pref., in *Dialoghi Italiani*, p. 927.

thoughts, battered by urgent cares, heated by fervent longings, and frequently agitated by chance occurrences." Impacted by these disturbances are both soul and body. In its primary capacity as active arbiter to the heroic urge "the soul, finding itself suspended, necessarily becomes less diligent and industrious in the governance of the body through the activity of the vegetative potency." And in its secondary capacity as passive attendant to the heroic urge "the body becomes emaciated, malnourished, debilitated, deficient of blood, and full of melancholy humors."¹⁹⁷

With this dual capacity of melancholy in mind Bruno distinguished two basic groups of enthusiasts. Those of the first group, he confessed, being weighed down by their melancholy, "display nothing other than blindness, stupidity, and irrational impetuosity, which tends toward senseless bestiality," whereas those of the second group, although also conspicuous for their melancholy, are given access "to a certain divine abstraction, by means of which in truth they become better than ordinary men." The latter group of enthusiasts Bruno further divided into two subgroups, the first consisting of those who, "through having been made into abodes for the gods or divine spirits, declare and perform marvelous things without either they or others understanding the cause," and the second, of those who, instead of serving as mere passive receptacles of the divine frenzy, are intellectually active participants in its processes.¹⁹⁸

Holding those in the grasp of the first type of divine frenzy to be passive vessels of God's will, Bruno maintained that those in the grasp of the second type "speak and perform, not as mere vessels and instruments, but as principal artificers and practitioners;" these, Bruno elaborated, "as a result of being experienced and skillful in contemplation, and through their possession of a lucid and intellectual spirit, sharpen their senses by an inner stimulus and natural fervor (*da uno interno stimolo e fervor naturale*), instigated by the love of divinity, of justice, of truth, of glory, of the fire of desire, and of the breath of intention, and in the sulfur of their cogitative faculty enkindle the rational light, with which they see more than is ordinarily possible."¹⁹⁹ In this way Bruno made a fundamental distinction between two kinds of favorable human genius. The first kind, represented by

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 5, pp. 1056-57.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, dial. 3, pp. 986-87.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 987.

mystics and prophets—and, by extension, by the poets—are those who minimally engage their intellects in the spiritual processes invigorated by the divine frenzies, and the second kind, those who maximally engage their intellects.

In this way Bruno established a wide range of genial types that included not only speculative philosophers, but also those better known for their imaginative powers such as the mystics, prophets, and poets. As he put this wider meaning of his genial theory in the *Spaccio*: “There succeed in this place of heaven Divine Frenzy, Rapture, Enthusiasm, Prophecy, Study, and Genius (*Ingegno*), together with their kin and ministers.”²⁰⁰ What the variegated versions of genial aspiration held in common for Bruno was more notable than what distinguished them. For, in his mind, they shared a heroic quest for union with a beloved object which, being infinitely removed, instills perpetual restlessness in the lover corresponding to the perpetual restlessness built into the infinitely expanded cosmos. Whichever kind of frenzy applied to a given case, Bruno determined that inexorably accompanying the “inner stimulus and natural fervor” characterizing the heroic soul is the natural fervor of what he paradoxically dubbed his “melancholic and perverse humor.”

A further coincidence of opposites detected by Bruno in his heroic lover is that between an intellectual desire to achieve unity with a beautiful form and an erotic desire to achieve sensual coition with a beautiful body. Still suggestive of a Ficinian bias demarcating intellectual from sensual love is the declaration assigned to Tansillo in the *Eroici furori* that “all love proceeds from seeing: intelligible love from seeing intelligibly, and sensual love from seeing sensually.”²⁰¹ A closer appraisal of what is meant by this statement in Bruno’s changed philosophical context, however, does not lend support to its disjunctive implications. For, as reinterpreted through the philosophical lenses supplied him by Cusanus and Telesio, Bruno’s love doctrine signified, not that the heroic lover obliterates sensual love at every stage of ascent, but rather, in keeping with the aforesaid rule that “all things consist of contraries,” that he is permitted to experience both forms of love concurrently.

Exclaims Bruno’s Tansillo in keeping with this principle: “The soul, which is located at the horizon of corporeal and incorporeal

²⁰⁰ *Spaccio*, dial. III, in *Dialoghi*, p. 754.

²⁰¹ *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 4, in *Dialoghi*, p. 1015.

nature, is simultaneously raised to superior things and inclined to inferior things."²⁰² Whereas Ficino called on Plato to justify a radical severance of the soul from the body, Bruno's naturalized version of Platonism would not allow him this way out. Just as Bruno held melancholy to be capable of oscillating back and forth between vice and virtue, so did he perceive the frenzy of love, as of the "heroical" melancholy humor in service to it, as displaying the same law of perpetual oscillation.

"Up, up, oh my fleeing thoughts, oh my rebel heart," uttered Bruno in echo of a celebrated appeal to God of St. Augustine, "let live the sense of sensible things and the intellect of intelligible things!"²⁰³ According to this psychological construct there is no longer a clear-cut distinction between vice and virtue, but only a distinction between objectives to which the passions are directed. "Behold, therefore," exulted Bruno in this regard, "how this heroic frenzy is different from the other baser frenzies, not as a virtue is different from a vice, but as a vice which is more divine and behaves divinely in a subject differs from a vice that in a subject is more bestial and behaves more bestially." For Bruno the stark contrast between vicious bestiality and virtuous divinity no longer held up: The difference between vice and virtue, he determined, "is not according to the form of being a vice (*e non secondo la forma dell'esser vizio*), but according to the varying subjects and modes."²⁰⁴

Lying behind Bruno's genial theory, then, was a naturalistic revision of Platonism that, while bearing affiliations with Ficino's subordination of Aristotelian naturalist to Platonic supernaturalist causation, propelled it in a new direction commensurate with a revolutionary cosmic and psychic vision. From a persisting Platonic perspective, it is true, Bruno ostensibly accepted that all matter is ultimately grounded in mind or idea. As Tansillo favorably cites the ancient Neoplatonist Plotinus in this regard: "The body, then, is in the soul (*ne l'anima*), the soul in the mind (*nella mente*), and the mind is either God or is in God."²⁰⁵ It is from the same Platonic point of view that Bruno affirmed, through his spokesman Tansillo, that the human

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 1022.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1019–20. Augustine's seminal part in shaping Bruno's thought in this regard is made still clearer later in the dialogue, part. II, dial. 2, p. 1116: "Cossì il *sursum corda* non è intonato a tutti, ma a quelli ch'hanno ali."

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 2, p. 978. On this passage see also Papi, *Anthropologia e Civiltà*, p. 185.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 3, p. 997.

soul, “being a divine thing, [is] by nature, not a servant, but a master of the material body.”²⁰⁶ But the Platonists also, with Aristotle’s help despite Bruno’s many protestations against the Peripatetic obfuscation of clearheaded thinking, guided Bruno in his view that, being condemned perpetually to pursue his infinitely removed beloved, the heroic lover is likewise condemned to experience the perpetual affliction of natural melancholy in response to his infinite pursuit.

Just as the principle of contraries applied for Bruno to the various categories of opposites inducing the affliction of melancholy in the heroic lover, so did it apply to the division he made within melancholy itself between its divinely virtuous and bestially vicious forms. In the dedicatory epistle prefacing his *Spaccio*, like the *Eroici Furori* addressed to Sidney, Bruno drew a contrast between “divine Frenzy (*il furor divino*), enthusiasm, rapture, prophecy, and contraction (*contrazione*), belonging to inspiration,” and, at the opposite pole, “bestial frenzy (*il furor ferino*), irrational impetuosity, dissolution of the spirit, and a scattering of the inner senses which belongs to that distempered kind of melancholy serving as the dark abode of perverse Genius (*stemprata melancolia, che se fa antro al Genio perverso*).”²⁰⁷ But in a further reference to the notion of *contrazioni*, lauded in the above passage as a property of divine frenzy—this in the *Eroici furori*, likewise dedicated to Sidney—Bruno revealed that his notion of “contractions” reduced to the same coincidence of opposites as did the “distempered kind of melancholy” which he referred to in the same context as a property of bestial frenzy; of these “methods of contraction,” Bruno cursorily noted, “some operate vituperously, and others heroically.”²⁰⁸ For a fuller exposition of this subject Bruno referred his readers to his *Sigillus sigillorum*.

In the section of the *Sigillus* systematically spelling out his contraction theory, it is true, Bruno found much to villify in the melancholy humor. In connection with the second of fifteen types of contraction, for example, Bruno railed against certain overly imaginative men and imprudent men, “with their feet planted in the air,” who are under the domination of the black bile.²⁰⁹ Or again, regarding the twelfth contraction, Bruno caustically ridiculed certain melan-

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 5, p. 1057.

²⁰⁷ *Spaccio*, “epistola esplicatoria,” in *Dialoghi*, p. 565.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, part. II, dial. 1, p. 1091.

²⁰⁹ *Sigillus sigillorum*, no. 36, in *Opera*, II, 182.

choly apocalyptic who, "viciously inclined to the saturnine complexion," falsely profess to see all things in heaven and on earth with one ecstatic glance, and even to foresee the future. The matter, however, was far different concerning those illustrating Bruno's thirteenth contraction, which included Zoroaster in their number, but also, St. Paul and St. Thomas; these, Bruno maintained, with their powers of mind directed to a single goal, are rapt into Heaven.²¹⁰ In corresponding fashion Bruno, in his *De la causa, principio e uno*, declared "melancholic enthusiasm" (*melancolico entusiasmo*),²¹¹—the humoral counterpart to his notion of *contrazioni*—as an affliction encountered as readily in association with the superior heroic forms of frenzy as with its inferior bestial forms.

Making the same point in his *Eroici furori*, Bruno had his spokesman Tansillo declare in melancholy's disfavor: "It is not a madness of the black bile that causes one to wander, as if guided by chance or as if transported by a disordered tempest beyond the limits of reason and the actions of prudence, . . . but it is a flame enkindled by the intelligible sun within the soul and by a divine impetus which lends it wings."²¹² It is also through this same Tansillo, however, that Bruno conceded to a more favorable effect of melancholy on the heroic lover's mind, turning it from an instrument of an ill-disciplined and obscure spirit into one equipped to serve as the instrument "of a well-disciplined soul and of a clear and lucid spirit."²¹³ The value of melancholy for Bruno, then, depended on the use to which it is put. Applied to bestial concerns, it is a bestial vice (*vizio*), whereas, applied to divine concerns, it is a divinely sanctioned virtue (*virtù*).

While exhibiting decidedly anti-Peripatetic tendencies in other respects, then, Bruno did not, like certain other Platonically inspired thinkers of his age still to be considered, opt to gravitate his anti-Peripatetic attacks around the question of human genius. If there is a difference between Ficino and Bruno on this issue, it is in emphasis rather than in kind. Further influenced by the metaphysics of Cusanus and Telesio, together with the Copernican astronomical system lending his wide-ranging speculations empirically observable and mathematical support, Bruno proposed both infinite reaches to

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 46, p. 189.

²¹¹ Bruno, *De la causa, principio e uno*, dial. 3, in *Dialoghi Italiani*, p. 277.

²¹² *Eroici furori*, part. I, dial. 3, in *Dialoghi*, p. 988.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, part. I, dial. 5, p. 1057.

philosophical speculation and poetic imagination—this corresponding to infinite reaches of the universe itself—and a perpetual shifting between opposing demands on the human mind. Yet Bruno also accepted that the enigmatic phenomenon of human genius, miraculously connecting finite nature with infinite supernature, could not escape finite melancholy suffering at the natural end of the cosmic spectrum.

* * *

The selection of writers employed in this chapter illustrates that, whether formally remaining within the boundaries of the traditional hierarchical world-views of the Platonists and Aristotelians or opting for novel non-hierarchical alternatives like those envisaged by Persio and Bruno, their queries into the origin of genius could still result in an explanation not markedly different from the genial hybrid popularized by Ficino. Also witnessed in the course of the present study, however, have been certain currents of thought diametrically opposed to Ficino's synthetical one, the representatives of which perceived the relationship between natural melancholy and divine inspiration to be, not a conciliatory one, but a discordant struggle between combatants. As we have shown, this dissolutive trend, which earlier had found in a radical Aristotelian naturalist like Pomponazzi and a radical skeptical fideist like Savonarola's disciple Gianfrancesco Pico unlikely bedfellows, became intensified with the shift away from a less volatile religious climate preceding the Lutheran revolt to the more volatile climate characterizing the century following that revolt. Much as the world was fast becoming polarized under the impact of such cataclysmic events as the ecclesiastical schisms, the witch hunts, and the geographical discoveries, so were ideas becoming polarized about how the world, together with the mind gauged to apprehend that world, is constructed. Reflecting that increasing philosophical polarization was a polarization in views about the origin and nature of human genius.

Caught in a kind of intellectual welter comprised of the Platonic notion of super-sensual forms, Aristotelian natural philosophy, Copernican heliocentrism, Telesian metaphysics, and a Cusan-Brunian vision of an infinitely expanded universe, the theorists of human genius increasingly found that they could no longer easily truck with the principle of *mediocritas aurea*, the Aristotelian "golden mean." Yet

even if they rejected mediocrity in favor of an alternative “heroic extreme,” as did, for example, the self-acclaimed Hermeticist Della Riviera and philosophical syncretist Bruno, they still debated with one another about whether that genial extreme arose out of natural or supernatural grounds. Continuing to inform both sides of this rift were heirs to the traditional Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical systems, whose further queries into the origin of human genius resulted, not in the happy marriage of Plato and Aristotle as the Ficinians held, but to their unhappy divorce in defiance of the Ficinian legacy.

The Platonists of the later Renaissance, in reaction to the kind of radical naturalizing of the world which they saw to be especially prominent at Padua, showed an inclination to free the supernatural frenzies—and with them the gifts of philosophical and poetic genius which they believed to be intrinsically bound up with those frenzies—from all dependency on natural causation. In opposition, however, were certain of the Peripatetics who, more often than not with the assistance of the Galenic physicians and astrologers, alternatively furnished a natural explanation of the very forces of genius which their opponents relegated to supernatural causation. The widening of the gap between Plato and Aristotle in the course of the late cinquecento and early seicento, as we will take note, became especially pronounced among the later theorists of poetry. But that debate, we will also bring out, hinged on principles that also applied beyond the narrow scope of poetic genius in particular to the phenomenon of genius in general.

As indicated in earlier chapters, these two different versions of Platonic genial theory did not necessarily confront one another in open warfare. Some exponents of Plato’s doctrine of divine frenzy (the earlier cited examples of Paolini, Verdizzotti, Viperano, Segni, and Ammirato might come to mind) simply ignored all reference to natural causes in their expositions, thereby sidestepping the need to take one side against the other.²¹⁴ Others in support of one or the other genial theories, however, were not willing to stop there, feeling compelled to force a radical choice between a doctrine referring the origin of genius to a place above nature and a doctrine referring genius exclusively to occult powers residing within nature.

²¹⁴ See above, pp. 259–64.

Common to both of these increasingly antagonistic philosophical outlooks, as we will not observe at closer hand, was a shared conviction by their spokesmen that the Ficinian conciliation of Peripatetic naturalist with Platonic supernaturalist principles was no longer credibly sustainable.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PROBLEM OF MELANCHOLY GENIUS ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION: THE COMPLETION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISSOLUTION

A. *The Latent Lines of Fracture*

The basic principles at stake in the Renaissance debate over the origin of genius are strikingly summarized in tracts by two late Renaissance writers holding opposing views on the subject, of which the second, ironically, represents largely a plagiarized version of the first. Their authors are Girolamo Maggi (1523–1572) and Marcello Donati (1538–1602). For whereas Maggi assumed a position on genius in basic agreement with the radically naturalist one of Pomponazzi, Donati, with dependence on Maggi's text to the point of sometimes quoting his words verbatim, rather struck in the opposite direction by referring inspiration to a supernatural origin transcending material nature. For these two thinkers, as for many others caught up in the fervor of the witch hunts, a basic touchstone of the debate over the origin of genius lay in the question of what prompts the genius of sorcerers.

Along familiar Aristotelian lines Maggi, in his *Libri variarum lectionum* (1564), compared the imagination to heated wax which is easily shaped into various figures and, on being cooled, retains the images formed. Illustrating this process, continued Maggi, are “the changes in our dreams (*mutationes somniorum*), the phantasies of which, for a brief moment, transform into a variety of passions and imaginative configurations.” While some were persuaded that these images are transmitted to the dreamer from a supernatural source, Maggi contrarily opined that “to be moved in this way is always natural.”¹

¹ Girolamo Maggi, *Variarum lectionum seu miscellaneorum libri IIII*, Venice: Ex officina Jordani Zileti, 1564, cap. 12. fol. 202^v. Best known for his theories on military engineering, Maggi also entered into the kinds of occult causes of nature which could be tapped for that purpose.

Maggi's interest in this question, as it happened, was dictated by more than an idle curiosity about how the imagination worked. It was dictated by a desire, through the agency of Aristotelian naturalism, to curb the witch-craze by undercutting the demonological outlook that made it possible.

"There is no question of a pact with demons," Maggi declared on the basis of the above-stated considerations, "nor is it worthy of belief, if demons exist, that they can possess the forms of men, or their voices, or the power which they are presumed to transmit to us." The aberrant behavior witnessed in accused witches, Maggi maintained, is better explained by a melancholy imagination than by demonic inspiration. Thus, while allowing that "many things in these people who are vulgarly called demoniacs or fanatics seem deserving of admiration," Maggi also registered his agreement with the author of the *Problemata*, who, he recalled, "attributes those things to the melancholy humor."²

Nevertheless, while deeming melancholy a more likely instigator of the kinds of uncanny mental powers assigned to witches than the demons, Maggi did not see it as working its effects unassisted. Acknowledging, with the backing of an earlier student of this subject, Andrea Cattaneo,³ that "the black bile is insufficient of itself to effect so many and such great marvels which we daily observe in those suffering from this affliction," Maggi broadened his view of the occult influences on genius to comprise "a combination of an active intellect, of abstract celestial minds (*abstractasque mentes coelestes*) joined to those of man, and of the humor (*succum*) of the body responding to its disposition and to certain stars."⁴ In his speculations on this subject, that is to say, Maggi held astrology and natural magic to be, not correlative explanations of demonic genius as for those following Ficino, but exegetic alternatives to the demonic explanation.

Inasmuch as his *De medica historia mirabili* came to light later in the century largely in the form of a plagiarism of Maggi, we would expect Marcello Donati to join Maggi in attacking the position of the demonologists. A careful analysis of Donati's tract, however, reveals a precisely opposite tactic of rationalizing the demonological thesis on Maggi's own Peripatetic grounds. Frequently quoting Maggi's

² *Ibid.*, fol. 203^r.

³ For Cattaneo's earlier attack on the Platonic genial theory see above, p. 165.

⁴ Maggi, *Variarum lectionum . . . libri*, fol. 203^r.

words verbatim, Donati marveled like his predecessor at the considerable variability and plasticity of the human imagination and gave much of the credit for these powers to the volatile melancholy humor. Similarly citing others such as Cattaneo in the same connection, but also Pomponazzi, "who was related to me through my mother" (*qui mihi ex matre affinis fuit*),⁵ Donati nevertheless led his readers to very different conclusions than Pomponazzi, Cattaneo, or Maggi.

Thus, taking aim at an interpretation of demonic influence that would reduce it to mere melancholy, Donati responded: "Some affirm that Aristotle was of this same opinion, but this, by Jove, is false."⁶ Pointing up a reputed reference to demons by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, together with another to "fanatics, or those made insane by demonic inspiration which has been breathed by a divine being (*fanatici, aut numine inflati Daemonica inspiratione insanientes*)," Donati declared that "demons were conceded by Aristotle, which investigators of diseases must never deny." Serving to corroborate this philosophical position for Donati was sacred scripture, evidenced by the exorcism of demoniacs by Christ and His apostles; in light of their examples, he attested, "the saints, and the fathers, and the orthodox theologians of the faith affirm this truth." Moreover, if testimony of a more empirical kind should be sought out, Donati added to the authority of the theologians that of "worthy writers in the medical literature."⁷

Underlying Donati's radical departure from Maggi's naturalist rendition of demonic genius, it should be clear from the above speculations, were more than differences in opinion about what motivated witches and sorcerers. Also underlying that departure was a basic difference of opinion about the derivation of genius in principle, no matter in what form it might be realized. The writers now to be treated were keenly attuned to the same volatile events provoking Donati's split from Maggi. But whereas the locus of Maggi's and Donati's concern consisted of the demonological question, the concern of these writers, we will now see, extended to all varieties of genial alienation, noble as well as ignoble.

⁵ Marcello Donati, *De medica historia mirabili libri sex*, Mantua: Per Franciscum Osanum, 1586, lib. VI, cap. 1, fol. 36^v.

⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 38^v.

⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 39^r.

If Maggi and Donati can be said to have clarified between them underlying faultlines that lay embedded beneath the synthesized naturalist-supernaturalist version of genius put into vogue by Ficino, another writer of the period also entering into the demon question, the Paduan educated physician Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576), illustrates that the same fissures are also discoverable within a single author. In the same regard, as we earlier saw, the Platonically minded Veronese physician Fracastoro, with Paduan affiliations preceding those of Cardano, permitted his philosophical queries into the subject of genius to override his medicine. This was not so clearly the case for the Milanese physician Cardano, however, whose medically based query into the demon question more openly clashed with his philosophical principles.

On one hand, reacting to what he considered to be a fallaciously contrived justification for the witch persecutions, Cardano had more difficulty than Fracastoro in squaring the superempirical demands of alleged “demonic genius” with the empirical demands of his medical profession. On the other hand, however, being himself a multit talented figure, with exceptional expertise not only in medicine, but also in philosophy and both theoretical and applied mathematics (in the last named capacity, for example, he devised gimbal-mountings for the use of seafarers), Cardano apparently developed a highly personal interest in the genius question that pointed him in a quite different direction from his more removed interest in the demon question. Even as Cardano resisted a demonological campaign, based on Platonic principles, to refer sorcery to supernatural causes, he simultaneously paid homage to a Platonically based genial theory that effectively referred his own extraordinary mental feats, together with the experience of melancholy that ineluctably accompanied them, to a supernatural source.

* * *

Like others falling in with the vogue of melancholy genius stimulated by the Florentine Platonic revival, Cardano’s revaluation of melancholy was bound up with a revaluation of the *vita solitaria et contemplativa* with which melancholy was commonly associated. “I am alone as much as I am able,” Cardano confessed in his autobiography, “although I realize that this way of life was condemned by Aristotle, who proclaimed that a solitary man is either a beast or a

god.”⁸ As this “confession” suggests, Cardano’s admission to a solitary disposition was not altogether a reluctant one, for the Aristotelian maxim to which it refers implies that solitary sequestration can as readily result in sublime divinity as abject bestiality. Cardano’s ambivalence to solitude, as spelled out, for example, in a section of his *De subtilitate*, was conditioned by his recognition of its association with two separate but frequently interrelated modes of alienation. The first is induced by natural melancholy, and the second, by invisible supernatural powers.⁹ Through a coupling of these alienating modes, Cardano agreed with the popular vogue of his day, solitude is capable of inducing what is best in human beings as well as what is worst.

“Solitude,” declared Cardano in his *De utilitate*, “is a divine thing, and a nursling of true happiness, in which you are as near to the immortals as you are far from the mortals.” Putting the same idea another way, Cardano maintained that “he who, on account of virtue, separates himself from men is placed in the company of deities and heroes (*huic genii & heroës sociantur*).”¹⁰ That scholars like himself often found themselves, by a necessity of their chosen profession, seeking out solitude could similarly be rationalized by the avowal that they belonged “in the company of deities and heroes.” If melancholy sorrow was to be found in the very lap of such scholarly seclusion, he pleaded, this was but the price the “heroic” scholar had to pay for aspiring to reach beyond the scope of ordinary men.

⁸ Cardano, *De propria vita liber* (Amsterdam: Apud Joannem Ravesteinium, 1594), cap. 13, p. 44. Trans. into English by Jean Stoner as *The Book of My Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1930), with passage indicated at p. 53. The larger philosophical outlook of Cardano as mirrored in this writing is nicely summarized by August Buck in his essay “Cardano’s Wissenschaftsverständnis in seiner Autobiographie ‘De vita propria’,” *Sudhoffs Archiv: Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 60 (1976), 1–12. Restating a civic humanist perspective underscoring his ambivalence to the solitary life is Cardano’s posthumously pub. *Proxenetæ seu de prudentia civili* (Leiden: Ex officina Elzeviriana, 1627). For full scale studies of Cardano see Alan Wykes, *Doctor Cardano, Physician Extraordinary* (London: Frederick Muller, 1969), and Markus Fierz, *Girolamo Cardano, 1501–1576: Physician, Natural Philosopher, Mathematician, and Interpreter of Dreams* (Boston: Birkhauser, 1983), and for briefer treatments, Thorndike, *Magic*, V, ch. 26, pp. 563 ff.; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 206–7; Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 188–9; and Schmitt and Skinner, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 247–50.

⁹ Cardano, *De subtilitate libri XXI* (Basel: Per Ludovicum, Lucium, 1554), lib. 18, esp. p. 524.

¹⁰ Cardano, *De utilitate ex adversis capienda libri III* (Basel: Per Henrichum Petri, 1561), lib. III, p. 797.

At times Cardano portrayed melancholy more as a passive effect than active motivator of extraordinary scholarly achievements, as when, for example, he observed concerning a subject of his own special expertise: "Geometry and arithmetic cause men to be sad—this because of their tedious cogitations."¹¹ Other times, however, he portrayed it as an active participant in the scholarly process, as when he asserted that the melancholy humor, though capable of impelling its possessor into the performance of disgraceful acts, is equally capable of inciting him "to dare the highest things."¹² No more in the second as in the first of these instances of melancholy alienation, however, did Cardano view the black bile as working solely through its own devices. Just as he saw possible demonic causation to lie behind ignominious expressions of melancholy, he saw possible divine causation to lie behind its noble expressions.

Referring to this higher cause of alienation in his *De subtilitate*, in typical Platonic language, as "a divine and angelic afflatus (*ab afflatu divino, angelicoque*)," Cardano exulted that on being touched by it "the peaceful mind, borne aloft to very exalted thoughts, displays its love of supernal things."¹³ In making this case Cardano, like Ficino before him, was faced with two interrelated dilemmas, both issuing out of the conflicting demands of his medical and philosophical principles. The first dilemma is how a condition characterized by Cardano in his medical writing as a species of melancholy, "which the Arabs call *illisci* and we Latins, *amorem*,"¹⁴ can be transformed from a bestial weight on the soul to a dynamic cause of the soul's release from bestiality, and the second dilemma, how a passionately erotic form of melancholy can be reconciled with the demands of a sober philosophical mind. Cardano's answered both of these dilemmas at once by the astrologically conceived rejoinder, contained in his *De subtilitate*, that philosophers, "as a result of contemplation, since their spirits are enervated by study, are less inclined to Venus."¹⁵ If Cardano were to find assistance for his philosophical speculation in the medical notion of love melancholy, he needed, like Ficino before him,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, lib. III, p. 501.

¹² Cardano, *De rerum varietate libri XVII* (Basel: Per Henrichum Petri, 1557), lib. VIII, cap. 40, p. 509.

¹³ *De subtilitate*, lib. XIX, p. 529.

¹⁴ Cardano, *Consilia medica*, in *Opera omnia*, 10 vols. (Lyons: Sumptibus Joannis Antonii Huguetan & Marci Antonii Rauaud, 1663), IX, 74.

¹⁵ *De subtilitate*, lib. XII, p. 365.

to find a way of transforming the venereal love of an earth-bound form into a saturnine love of abstract ideas. This way, as we have seen, was to raise, with further help both from the Platonic theory of love frenzy, the venereal love of material beauty into the saturnine love of beautiful forms divested of sensual desire.

Much as the prophetic impulse referred for Cardano to a source of knowledge transcending the senses, so at bottom did the philosophical impulse. Such a source Cardano termed "divine wisdom"—*sapientia divina*, defined in a tract specifically addressed to this subject as "a spontaneous gift of god, prepared neither by any art nor by any invention."¹⁶ Cardano's doctrine of "spontaneous wisdom," as it happened, grew out of the same set of *a priori* assumptions as did his doctrine of mathematical intuition—assumptions given wide currency by the Platonic legacy, declared in his *De rerum varietate* to be "the first principles of the sciences" (*scientiarum initia*). But for Cardano, as for Ficino before him, intuitional receptivity to "divine wisdom" did not exclude participation by the material body, including participation by the melancholy humor. As Cardano's training in medicine taught him at first hand, "human nature is affected by the body, by laws, by customs, and generally by anything which externally touches it."¹⁷

A condition of the medical literature which Cardano found to offer an instructive analogy for genial melancholy in all of its forms, philosophical melancholy included, is the gout. In its classification as a disease, conceded Cardano in a tract addressed to this affliction, gout can inflict a number of harmful effects on both mind and body, including languor, forgetfulness, irascibility, hatred, and pain. However, he added, the same affliction, when "yoked to temperance," rather has the effect of rendering "the senses quickened, the memory durable, the body vigorous, the health sound, the life long, the taste pure, the sleep tranquil, the soul pleasant, the thoughts cheerful, and the mind prompt for the studies of wisdom." Whereas other kinds of diseases are wont to confuse the mind, Cardano contended, "the gout augments and thoroughly sharpens it."¹⁸ Nor is the gout, Cardano added, alone among the human infirmities in its ability to

¹⁶ Cardano, *De sapientia libri quinque* (Orléans: Apud Petrum & Jacobum Chouët, 1624), lib. I, p. 31. On this tract see Rice, *Idea of Wisdom*, pp. 165 ff.

¹⁷ *De varietate*, lib. VIII, cap. 40, p. 293.

¹⁸ Cardano, *Podagrae encomium*, in *Opera omnia*, I, 224.

produce similarly praiseworthy consequences. As Aristotle understood, comparable results can be achieved through the melancholy humor.

Like gout, queried Cardano, "is not melancholy a disease?" Yet in its case too "have not many wise and outstanding men, as reported by Aristotle, labored under its effects?" Counting philosophers and mathematicians among these, Cardano inquired further: "What of the poets, prophets, and sibyls, who are all afflicted by disease? The more they have been held in esteem, all the more have they been afflicted." Owing to their brooding dispositions, "few of these have had the fortune to enjoy a long life." In this way Cardano, like Fracastoro, discerned a substantial point of union between the poetical and philosophical functions underlying their modal differences—this consisting of the paradoxical endeavor of poets and philosophers alike to utilize material means in their "heroic" endeavor to raise themselves to a place above matter. Listed among the abject melancholy poets by Cardano were Virgil, Lucretius, Ovid, and, to our surprise, Horace. For, as judged by Cardano, even the paragon of rational decorum among poets could not at last escape from the poet's curse, the affliction of melancholy.¹⁹

To this point Cardano would appear to have been better placed in the prior chapter devoted to relatively consistent, if sometimes rather strained, efforts to maintain philosophical equilibrium between the Platonic and Aristotelian genial theories. What sets him apart from the representatives of the melancholy vogue there indicated are his further queries into the demon question, forced by the witch hysteria, that had the effect of upsetting rather than firming up the uneasy equilibrium they envisaged in their campaign to accommodate natural to supernatural causation. At bottom the basic clash in Cardano was not so much between the imperatives of medicine and philosophy as between the imperatives of medicine and theology. Distinguishing him from the demonologists of his day, however, who were intent on appropriating medical precepts on behalf of their supercorporeal goals, Cardano, with Avicenna a guide, took the opposite tack of submitting claims of demonic confederacy on the part of witches to a corporeal diagnosis that could conceivably usurp a theological diagnosis.

From his own theological standpoint Cardano announced his steadfast belief in the existence of demons, a denial of which, he well

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

understood in the wake of the controversies stirred up by Pomponazzi, entailed a corresponding denial of immortality. "If there are demons," as Cardano restated the logic behind this connection of the two concepts in his *De rerum varietate*, "there is also a mind that survives the body (*si daemones sunt, etiam animus ipse superest*)," a consideration leading him to the further one that "if there is nothing to survive the body, all hope will have to be placed in this mortal life, as many now hold to be the case."²⁰ Yet even as Cardano circumspectly sought to distinguish his position on the demon question from that its skeptics, his own medical judgments in this area paradoxically cast him, in the eyes of others similarly ascertaining an interlocking of the immortality and demon questions, as himself a foremost purveyor of the very impiety of belief he here is shown to censure. For these detractors, among whom we earlier cited Battista Codronchi,²¹ Cardano's name was closely linked to that of Pomponazzi, whose lead he was assumed to have followed in reducing demonically incited alienation to a mere humoral indisposition.

The key to such attacks on Cardano's motives during this period, when the witch trials were at their height, lies in the kind of operational skepticism inherent in the medical profession which found in Avicenna a foremost prior authority. In keeping with his Avicennan guideline, Cardano, even while theoretically admitting to the existence of demons and their possible incursion into human affairs, definitively circumscribed the range of their activity. As observed in his *De secretis*, "if demons . . . exist, they probably function on a higher mental plane than man and will hardly comprehend our vain ambitions and insignificant achievements."²² Applying this logic to the subject of sorcery, Cardano discerned in the natural melancholy humor a better explanation for the kinds of aberrant behavior associated with this activity than supernatural demons.

Thus, conceding in his *Consilia medica* that "it has appeared to certain physicians that melancholy occurs by means of a demon,"

²⁰ Cardano, *De varietate*, lib. XVI, cap. 93, p. 1084.

²¹ See above, pp. 214–15.

²² Cardano, *De secretis*, cap. 20, cited in Fierz, *Cardano*, p. 109. For the original of this passage see Cardano, *Opera omnia*, III, 548. Pointing up Cardano's dual approach to demons, in which he admits to their existence but disallows them powers of intervention in human affairs, see, in addition to Fierz, Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 237. Further verification of Cardano's demonological duality is found in *De varietate*, lib. XII, cap. 61, pp. 801 ff. Holding Cardano's demonological skepticism to issue out of an underlying atheism is Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea*, pp. 45 ff.

Cardano responded that, even if this were true, the physician should not permit his diagnosis to reach beyond the limits of his nature-based expertise.²³ While not outrightly denying that demons might be lurking behind the scenes in certain instances, stirring up their victims by first stirring up their melancholy humor, Cardano cautioned the physician, *qua physician*, to be concerned, not with a reputedly remote demonic cause behind a given infirmity, but only with the proximate physiological cause. Even should we accept the premise that melancholy and demonic possession are complementary rather than mutually exclusive determinants of psychic alienation, cautioned Cardano, it is all the more imperative to address its natural causes before moving to presumed supernatural ones, since, to do so will eliminate a favored natural inroad of the demons into the world; in this way, he argued, we can thereby dispose of the need for further inquiries into the matter by overly zealous inquisitors.

One of Cardano's more striking expositions on this subject appears in his *De rerum varietate*, where, with Avicenna's help, he appears to undermine a basic argument of the witch hunters by suggesting that natural melancholy better than demonic possession explains the kinds of imaginary ravings and eccentric behavior assigned by the theologians to those accused of sorcery. "There is a certain humor within us, which we call the black bile," Cardano wrote, "which, when it rages and occupies the supreme citadel of the brain, casts the mind down from its normal state;" so uncanny are its effects that "many call this a demon" (*hunc daemonem appellant multi*).²⁴ The kinds of marvels effected thereby, Cardano testified, appear to be explainable by reference to a cause existing "beyond nature" (*supra naturam res videatur*).²⁵ But appearances, Cardano insisted, can be deceiving, with the obvious arena of demonstration presented by the witch persecutions.

It is not coincidental, Cardano mused, that those "whom we label sorceresses (*lamias*), and the vulgar, witches (*strigas*) are largely wretched, beggarly women, subsisting on chestnuts and wild nutriments growing in mountain valleys;" given that they "prefer black bile and melancholy," he noted, "they are taciturn and frantic, and differ little from those who believe that they are possessed by a demon." While freely conceding to the sinister notoriety of these wretched

²³ Cardano, *Consilia medica*, cons. 10, in *Opera omnia*, IX, 71–72.

²⁴ *De varietate*, lib. VIII, cap. 40, p. 509.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

hags, who typically placed themselves further outside the normal bounds of society by their barrenness and unsightly physical deformities, Cardano nevertheless pleaded that they were more to be pitied than feared. For this reason, charged Cardano, not only were excessively zealous inquisitors deceived in this matter, but also, owing to their rampant melancholy imaginations, many of the accused themselves, “so that if you take account of their words—for how intrepidly and with what perseverance they relate those things which never were and never could have been—you would think they were the truth.”²⁶ Owing to their highly agitated conditions, according to Cardano, these wretched souls exhibit, not supernatural powers as they would have us believe, but wild ramblings of overworked and overextended imaginations.

Summarizing his bold challenge to the witch hunters in his *De varietate*, Cardano concluded that “this deception generally owes to three principal causes: the phantasms of the black bile, the intrepidity of those who have become seized by these misfortunes, and the delusion of judges.”²⁷ To be sure, suggesting that he was not prepared to assume the full onus of witch apologist concurrently being suffered by his German contemporary Johann Weyer, (= Wier, 1515–1588), we find Cardano now and then hedging in this regard, as when he conceded, even after acknowledging that such women should be adjudged more foolish than truly sorcerous, that, under certain extreme circumstances, “no one, therefore, will judge that these heretical women, being impious and homicidal worshipers of demons, are not worthy of death.” Cardano’s rationale was that, even should we demonstrate that such misguided souls are victims of their own folly rather than of the Devil’s machinations, “this type of folly is very dangerous;” accordingly, Cardano exhorted, “lest they recover their senses,” they are justly condemned to physical extinction by the authorities.²⁸

²⁶ *Ibid.*, lib. XV, cap. 80, pp. 991–92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 994.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 997. For scholarship surrounding this controversy, which principally pitted the Frenchman Jean Bodin (1530–1596) against Weyer, see my *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 291, note 24. Pointing up a heavy reliance of Weyer on Cardano is Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 238, who also, pp. 117–18, holds that the misogynist tone of those, like Cardano and Weyer, who sought to stem the tide of the witch hunts betrays a denigration of women that often was even more clearly defined than that characterizing the writings of their demonological opponents.

It should be evident from this sop thrown by Cardano to the inquisitors, nevertheless, that it rests, not on demonological grounds, but on grounds of expediency. Capital punishment, Cardano determined from this practical standpoint, is to be applied only as a last resort, the result of a rigorously considered judgment by the courts that the integrity of the Christian community will be fundamentally threatened by the said witch's further existence. On the same grounds of expediency, on the other hand, Cardano could equally argue for mercy in the large majority of cases.

Indeed, Cardano cautioned on the same ground of expediency, by adopting a policy of punishment in place of one seeking the physical and emotional relief of these wretches, the judges could very well be encouraging the very behavior they were endeavoring to suppress. The reason for this, Cardano proffered, is explained by the melancholy temperament which is a likely source of the aberrant behavior under suspicion. For from the melancholy that is "perceived in foolish and heretical persons," Cardano explicated, arise "fearful thoughts, superstitions, fastings, and labors," all characteristics making those in whom they are present inordinately "equipped to suffer" (*parati . . . pati*). Given, then, that the melancholy humor "is of marvelous assistance in the toleration of death and sufferings," it followed for Cardano that it is able to instill in its victim considerable endurance before their tormentors.²⁹ By thus inflicting excessive punishment on the melancholy objects of their displeasure, Cardano warned, the inquisitors could very well be playing into the hands of the Devil by handing him martyrs to his evil cause. In conclusion, underscoring the pragmatic basis of his opposition to the witch persecutions, Cardano cautioned the judges at witch trials that "it appears more useful (*videtur igitur utilius*) to vex the guilty by a long-lasting incarceration (for in time the humor is dissipated, and the criminal perceives her guilt and punishment) than to kill them by a savage manner of death."³⁰

Serving to reinforce Cardano's medically based rationale for leniency toward witches—the crux, as it happened, of Scaligero's attack on his alleged irrationalism—was a rationale based on the principles of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, lib. VIII, cap. 40, pp. 515–16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 509–10.

natural magic.³¹ The marvelous powers hidden within nature, Cardano attested, are capable of producing such powerful effects that they appear to the vulgar to be the work of supernatural demons or angels. For Cardano natural melancholy, with a corresponding ability to produce effects mistaken for demonically instigated ones, represented a fitting bodily agent of natural magic. A pertinent question raised by Cardano's appropriation of melancholy by natural magic, which he fails to answer, is how nature-based occult powers presumed to be divested of demonic infiltration are hermeneutically distinguishable from the occult natural powers which his demonological detractors declared to be potentially subject to demonic intrusion and manipulation. Another pertinent question, also unanswered, is how the occult powers residing in melancholy are able to be expropriated from the demons and put to the use of God.

Of the marvelous activities which Cardano saw as potentially arising out of the occult marrow of nature, one in particular crystallized in his mind the ontological divide separating demonically instigated from divinely inspired genius. For Cardano, as for others entering into the subject of the demon question, a method favored by the demons for luring unsuspecting souls into their grasp was through a simulation of divine prophecy. Genuine prophetic insight, Cardano postulated, is a form of divine revelation that is optimized in a passive state of dreaming when the mind is maximally free of interfering distraction. Such counterfeit prophecy as is provoked by the demons, on the other hand, Cardano conceived as arising from a place within rather than beyond nature, his explanation being that the demons, by their ability to peer into and manipulate the dark secrets of nature for their perverse motives, are able to produce therefrom imaginary phantasms in the mind easily confused by the credulous with divinely revealed visions. For this reason, Cardano

³¹ See, e.g., *ibid.*, lib. XVI, cap. 90, pp. 1058 ff. Cf. lib. XII, cap. 61, p. 457, where Cardano ridicules magical theorists such as Trithemius and Agrippa of Nettesheim, who, in justification of their occult speculations, had offered a rationale for magic not unlike Cardano's own. However, the picture of these figures adopted by Cardano was not of demonic magicians, but of deluding charlatans. On Cardano's criticism of Trithemian magic see my *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, p. 170. On Agrippa, a disciple of Trithemius to whom he dedicated the first ed. of his *De occulta philosophia*, see Nauert, *Agrippa*, esp. pp. 222 ff. On the Scaligero-Cardano polemic see above, pp. 234-35.

submitted, “the demons are said to be fallacious, since the method of divining which they possess, which is natural, is also fallacious.”³²

One ground put forth by Cardano for the unreliability of demonically instigated prophecy lies in a distinction he drew between indirect inference of future events from natural causes and direct intuition of the future mirroring illuminations received from God. Being fundamentally obstructed from a view of the future which divine revelation alone can provide, Cardano reasoned in his *Somniorum Synesiorum*, the demons have no other recourse, either with the aid of melancholy or apart from it, but to infer the future indirectly (*ex oblique*). At the other extreme, with an oft-repeated Aristotelian analogy to assist him comparing the prophet to a target shooter but now with a revised Platonic rendering, Cardano declared that “whichever soul hits the mark rightly perceives it by direct intuition (*recto intuitu inspicit*).”³³ Another ground, moreover, closely intertwined with this one, lies in a distinction he concurrently drew between intuited prophecy and prophecy instigated by natural melancholy; as he noted in a later chapter of the same tract, “in general those who are melancholic dream very many things.”³⁴ On both of these grounds—of the uncertainty of natural inferences and of the unreliability of a melancholic imagination—Cardano determined that demonic prophecy is no more trustworthy than finite nature on which it depends. True prophetic acumen, Cardano maintained, is the property, not of a demoniac with dependency on knowledge acquired by accessing the hidden places of nature, but rather of a soul directly privy to divine truth located in a place above nature.

* * *

Cardano, then, who experienced in his own person a conflict between his genial needs and his wish to ameliorate the plight of accused witches, adumbrated in his writings a divisive trend in late Renaissance thinking about genius which was put into far sharper focus by others of his time who no longer made a pretense at finding an accommodating point of juncture between natural melancholy and

³² *De varietate*, lib. XIV, cap. 68, p. 918.

³³ Cardano, *Somniorum Synesiorum, omnis generis insomnia explicantes libri IV* (Basel: Per Henricum Petri, 1562), lib. I, cap. 3, p. 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, lib. III, cap. 9, p. 212. On Cardano's view of dreams as natural occurrences see Fierz, *Cardano*, p. 126.

supernatural inspiration. While this polarizing trend in philosophy will be shown to embrace the entire range of genial functions, one in particular, prophetic insight, will stand out more than any other as a pivot of debate. For many of those addressing themselves to the origin of human genius at this late stage of Renaissance thought, the genial capacity for accurate prophetic intuition in a world increasingly marked by vicissitudinous uncertainties became a crystallizing test of genius in general, which was cast on both sides of the issue as a rare—indeed, “heroic”—ability to escape the bonds of the deceptive senses to a higher realm of truth-elucidating mind.

Continuing to stake out a place in close proximity to the subject of prophecy in many of the writers still to be considered is poetry, which Plato, in seeming contradiction to its ban from his ideal republic, reasserted in other of his dialogues as a divinely inspired art in essential kinship with exceptional prophetic acumen. Yet on this subject too some Renaissance Platonists revealed certain fracture lines within the Ficinian genial doctrine that intimated, not a cohesive integration of its natural and supernatural components, but rather its corrosive disintegration. A case in point is the author of a writing picking up on the love theme turned into a popular fad by Ficino’s *De amore*, Giacomo Roviglioni (16th cent.). Calling on Plato in his *Discorso intorno alla essenza d’amore* to authorize the postulate that “love is a great poet, and causes all those whom it accosts, even if they should be ignorant or rude, to become poets,”³⁵ Roviglioni, in a treatment of the theme of prophecy in love’s affiliation, determined, in contradiction with a basic Ficinian postulate, that poetry and prophecy do not after all flow from the same supermundane source. For whereas, according to Roviglioni, prophetic acuity indeed owes to a divine origin, poetry, as the more extreme among the Peripatetics maintained, rather issues wholly out of nature.

There are, Roviglioni determined, four types of prediction: the first, supernatural (*sopranatura*); the second, against nature (*contra natura*); the third, through nature (*per natura*), and the fourth, outside of nature (*fuori di natura*). The first form of prediction, Roviglioni elaborated, “is of the holy prophets, and therefore is called the prophetic spirit; the second, of the demoniacs, and is called the diabolical spirit; the

³⁵ Giacomo Roviglioni, *Discorso intorno alla essenze d’amore* (Casale: Bernardo Grasso, 1595), p. 51.

third, of the poets, and is termed by Aristotle in his *Problemata* the lymphatic instinct and poetic heat; and the fourth, of madmen, and is called by the physicians the frenetic fury." Roviglioni's departure from Ficino is most discernibly evident in the third-named form of prediction pertaining to poets, which, following the Aristotelian *Problemata*, he took to be naturally rather than supernaturally generated. "The poetic heat," declared Roviglioni, "is a natural intemperance caused by the temperament of the body, through which, when the seat of the brain and organ of the rational faculty is immoderately heated, the soul is raised and enabled to foresee future things."³⁶

For Roviglioni, that is to say, prophecy and poetry were no longer united through the Platonic frenzies, but, on the contrary, divided in accordance with the cleavage separating spirit from matter. Putting Roviglioni's prophetic-poetic split another way: an untraversable line of demarcation is to be drawn between the melancholy-free revelations of divinely inspired prophets and melancholy-instigated phantasms of the poets. Roviglioni's theory of human genius, then, while accepting of Plato's theory of divinely inspired prophecy, demurs from extending to a melancholy poet like the obscure Maracus mentioned in the *Problemata* its divinely generated powers. That a poet of a far more illustriously elevated status like Ovid failed to recognize the formative role of natural melancholy when he declared a god to be present in the inspired poet, contended Roviglioni, does not argue against this reading of the poetic enterprise, but only points up his mistaking for divine intervention "the natural cause (*la cagion naturale*) of this heat."³⁷

Roviglioni's detection of a split between the poetic and prophetic genial functions, corresponding to a larger metaphysical split between nature and supernature, is a mere tip of the iceberg, the larger implication of which is a split between the two ancient theories of genius fused into one by Ficino and his disciples. The remainder of this chapter will be taken up with the assessment of three principal groups of writers broaching on this subject, all upholding, not the unification of the Platonic and Aristotelian genial theories as the disciples of Ficino would have it, but rather a radical severance of those the-

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* The relevant line of Ovid called upon by Roviglioni in this regard is from his *Fasti* vi, 5: "Est Deus in nobis, agitante calescimus ille/Impetus hic sacrae semina mentis habet."

ories. The first group is comprised of skeptical fideists distrustful of all forms of philosophy; the second group, of Platonists intent on purifying their supernaturalist principles of Aristotelian naturalism; and the third group, of Aristotelians intent on explicating the marvels of nature independently of Platonic supernaturalist presuppositions. Finally, bringing our presentation of this bifurcative trend to a chronological as well as a conceptual conclusion, we will call on the Neapolitan philosopher Tomasso Campanella to illustrate that the kinds of drastic cosmic and metaphysical changes in thinking that accompanied the impending scientific revolution, while demonstrably capable of allowing a revised version of an amalgamated Platonic-Aristotelian theory of melancholy along Brunian lines, was equally capable of encouraging a severance of the components comprising that amalgamation.

B. *The Fideist-Skeptical Rapture*

In a late cinquecento oration before the Perugian Academia degli Insensati, ostensibly in endorsement of the Platonic divine frenzy theory, Filippo Massini (1554–1617) declared poetry to be “neither an occurrence of fortune, nor a workmanship of art, . . . but a privilege and divine gift descending from a secondary mind of God and entering into the minds of human beings.”³⁸ With the further help of Pythagoras Massini informed his Perugian audience that the divine frenzy, comprising series of concordant reverberations originating in Heaven and conveyed to human beings through the mediation of Jupiter, Apollo, and the nine Muses, is reciprocally capable of impelling the poet and his entranced listeners into musical harmony with the universe and with God. Thought of in this way, Massini entreated his audience, the divine frenzy inspiring poets corresponds to what the mystics term ecstasy. Having been spurred by “a sweet and amorous violence” (*con dolce, & amorosa violenza*), as Massini set forth his concept of poetic rapture, the souls of those moved by the poetic

³⁸ Filippo Massini, *Della conversione dell'huomo*, in *Lettoni dell'estatico insensato, recitate da lui pubblicamente in diverse tempi nell'Accademia de gli Insensati di Perugia* (Perugia: Appresso Pietroiacomo Petrucci, 1588), lez. 3, pp. 99–100. On this oration see Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, pp. 407–409; Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 207–209, 865–66; and Danilo Aguzzi-Barbagli, “Humanism and Poetics,” in Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism*, III, 125.

frenzy “become ecstatics, alienating their minds and thoughts for a brief time from every other object.”³⁹

If he had stopped there Massini could be viewed as presenting one of the more forceful statements of his time putting the Platonic inspiration theory of poetry to the service of the Catholic reform movement. As it happened, however, Massini did not stop there, concluding his Perugian oration with a postscript effectively demolishing the theoretical edifice that he had so arduously constructed in the main body of his text. “My lords,” he at last confessed to his audience, “all those things which I here, and in the preface to this lecture, have said concerning this poetic frenzy, arising, as they do, from the fabulous poetic doctrines of Plato, have been intended as nothing more than an amusing joke (*s’è detto per ischerzare piacevolmente*). For, indeed, I know and understand very well that poetry, together with its interpretation by the poet, is not truly an afflatus, as Plato falsely imagined, but is a faculty and an art (*è facoltà, & arte, e non afflato, come falsamente s’imaginò Platone*).” As such, the speaker finally conceded, the art of poetry at bottom owes, not to divine inspiration as earlier stated in jest, but to a combination of artifice and fortune. In any case, as Massini piously concluded his Perugian oration, “I hold all these things, and everything else which fails to accord with that which the Catholic Church approves, to be false and not uttered.”⁴⁰

If, as evidenced by Massini, a Platonic theory of poetic inspiration essentially free of Aristotelian naturalist principles could prove troublesome to those intent on closely hewing to the demands of the Catholic reform movement, still more troublesome was a theory of Platonic inspiration tied to Aristotelian principles. Such was especially the case when the topic of discussion shifted from poetry to its commonly employed Platonic affiliate, prophecy, a disjunctive trend in philosophical thinking aptly summarized by a commentator on Pico della Mirandola’s *Conclusiones cabalisticas*, Archangelo da Borghuovo (16th cent.). “The visions of the prophets,” proclaimed Da

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101. For a reconfirmation of this doctrine, see pp. 145–46. Massini can thus be invoked to underscore the observation of Palisca, *Musical Thought*, p. 225, that, from a Platonic point of view, “melody is the product of . . . enthusiasm and not solely a cure for it.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

Borgonuovo, “are more certain than natural reasons, because natural reasons have their principles validated from things which have been sensed and seen without those principles being understood; the visions of the prophets, on the other hand, who intuit their object free of deception, are far more trustworthy.”⁴¹ It followed for those in agreement with this proposition that the philosophically unbridgeable gulf dividing intuited revelation from “natural reasons” also divides revelation from a naturally aggravating agent such as melancholy. So far as this view can be said to accord with that presented by Da Borgonuovo’s mentor Pico, it is more with the Pico under Savonarola’s than Ficino’s influence—the same Savonarola who had led his nephew Gianfrancesco, with the help of the ancient skeptics, to comparably disjunctive results. It was an approach to the genius question, moreover, that, in the context of the competing religious reform movements in force during this period, was as appealing to the Protestant as to the Catholic side of the religious schism.

Illustrating a corresponding Protestant slant on the subject of prophecy was Girolamo Zanchi (1550–1590), who, under the title *De divinatione*, divided the causes of vaticination into three categories—divine, diabolical, and natural, with only the first category of divinatory visions, received sometimes through nocturnal dreams (*somnia*) and sometimes through diurnal frenzies (*furori*), held to be truly deserving of the divinatory label. As to how we are able to distinguish truly divine inspiration from its natural and demonic look-alikes, Zanchi answered that, whereas predictions prompted by natural melancholy induce imaginary delusions and accompanying erratic behavior, and predictions prompted by demons induce impiety of thought and reprobate moral behavior, divinely inspired prophecy reaches to a realm vulnerable neither to melancholy deceptions of the imagination nor to the wicked temptations of the demons. As summarized by Zanchi, genuine divination, radically distinguishing it from its false melancholic and demonic look-alikes, “is a certain power externally conveyed by God and residing for the most part in the minds of pious men, by means of which, being sane of mind,

⁴¹ Archangelo da Borgonuovo, *Cabalistarum selectiora obscurioraque dogmata, a Joanne Pico ex eorum commentationibus pridem excerpta* (Venice: Apud Franciscum Franciscium Senensem, 1569), concl. 45, fol. 200^r. Pico’s “Cabalistic Conclusions” found in *Opera omnia*, I, 80–83.

they are inwardly illuminated (*intus illuminati*), and calmly and sweetly moved both to pious and honest actions and to the proclamation of true prophecies.⁴²

Departing, nevertheless, from the commonplace demonological view finding in the melancholy humor a propitious agent of the demons, Zanchi viewed that supposition as excessively mitigating the offenses of their perpetrators. Such impious enthusiasts as allowed their imaginative faculties to fall under the influence of the demons, Zanchi maintained, among whom he specifically listed “the Anabaptists and Papists,” owed their visions no more to natural than to divine causes; for, he insisted, quite independently of either natural or divine assistance but necessarily with divine permission, “the Devil is able to foresee many future things” (*potest enim etiam Daemon future multa praenoscerē*).⁴³ As for the opposing philosophical contention, ascribed to Aristotle, that natural melancholy is able to trigger divinatory visions independently of demonic causation, Zanchi replied that an inflamed black bile, while unquestionably capable of moving the sense-based imagination, is inherently incapable of traversing the epistemological chasm dividing the phantasms of the imagination from the superimaginary illuminations received from God. The only sound prediction that can possibly be made by such a melancholy dreamer, Zanchi contended, is that, lest he quickly be furnished with an antidote, he can be expected to fall into even more serious fits of melancholy.⁴⁴

Assuming an equally uncompromising view of divination from the Catholic side of the Reformation schism was the church bishop Celso Mancini (ca. 1542–1612), who expressly corrected Ficino in a tract specifically addressed to this subject that nothing so puny as a natural melancholic disposition can possibly lead to the communication of divine foreknowledge. Whereas, noted Mancini, “divination con-

⁴² Girolamo Zanchi, *De divinatione* (Hannover: Apud Guilielmum Antonium, 1610), pp. 158–59, 169. Placing this subject of divination in the larger context of magic is Zanchi’s *Tractationum theologiarum volumen . . .* (Neustadt [Palatinate]: Ex Officina Josuae & Wilhelmi Fratrum Harnisiorum, 1597), cap. 17, thesis 5, pp. 469 ff. On Zanchi’s anti-magical views see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 503–504, and on his views of divination, Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 110–111. On Zanchi’s Protestant affiliations see Camponetto, *Protestant Reformation*, pp. 185–87. A disciple of Peter Martyr the Younger (= Pietro Martire Vermigli, 1500–1562), Zanchi left his Bergamo home in 1554 to be close to his master in Strassburg.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 161–62, 171.

sists of a certain maximum (*divinatio sit quoddam maximum*),” the melancholy humor, being mired in the natural sphere at the opposite extreme of the cosmic spectrum “is unable to exert its influence beyond its own [limited] powers.”⁴⁵ To imagine otherwise, following Mancini’s logic, is akin to imagining that we can pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

For this reason, Mancini charged, it was not only the Peripatetics who should be called to account for assigning an inordinate role to the lowly black bile in the prophetic act, but also a nominal Platonist like Ficino who, under Peripatetic influence, “located excessive divinity in the melancholy humor.”⁴⁶ This is not to say, however, Mancini acceded to the Aristotelians, that the black bile is utterly bereft of a certain predictive potential, a virtue of the humor signified by Aristotle’s likening of prophets, in his treatise on divination, to skillful dart-throwers—a comparison subsequently reiterated by Plutarch and Themistius (4th cent.). But even should we accept this analogy, Mancini reminded his readers, a melancholic skillful at hitting his prognostic mark is still inherently unable to attain to the kind of infallible accuracy characteristic of a divinely inspired prophet.

As Mancini underscored melancholy’s prophetic deficiencies: just as a finite wave will never touch a bank infinitely removed from the thrower of a stone, or a physical lyre will never perfectly resonate with infinitely removed divine harmonies, likewise will the black bile never achieve sufficient stature to gain access to infinitely removed divine knowledge. For this, argued Mancini, there is required a power “far more excellent than the melancholy humor” (*multo praestantior humore melancholico*). Just as there is no measurable proportion between finite and infinite things, exclaimed Mancini in language more reminiscent of Cusanus than of Ficino, likewise “there is no comparison between the primal foreseeing of the future and the melancholy humor.”⁴⁷

To say that Mancini rejected melancholy as a possible mediating agent of of divinely inspired prophecy, however, is not the same as

⁴⁵ Celso Mancini, *De somnis, ac synesi per somnia*. . . (Ferrara: Apud Victoriam Baldinum, 1591), cap. 14, p. 67. On Mancini’s quarrel with the Ficinian genial theory see Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 38–42.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 14, p. 66.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 13, p. 61; cap. 14, p. 66.

saying that he rejected the principle of mediation altogether. Inasmuch as an inspired prophet is temporarily "vested in this crass body far removed from God," Mancini granted, it follows that he must be endowed "with a mean which can unify the extremes."⁴⁸ Since the melancholy humor is insufficient to supply such a means, Mancini reasoned, there is required a supernatural agent to meet the same mediating demand. Such a mediating agent, he determined, is sufficiently realized in the angels and in the immortal souls of men. Accordingly, Mancini maintained, closer to the truth of this matter than Ficino was an ancient Neoplatonist greatly admired by Ficino for his philosophical insights, Porphyry. Ficino's claims to the contrary notwithstanding, Mancini contended, Porphyry made no mention of melancholy when, in the language of the pre-Christian gentiles, he referred "the divination of dreams both to demons and to those of our souls which have been purified and rightly disposed."⁴⁹

Another late Renaissance writer to point up the incommensurability between natural melancholy and the supernatural requirements of inspired prophecy, Giulio Sirenio (fl. 1575), entered into this question as an excursus in an attack on astrological divination. Having, in his aptly named *De fato*, disengaged prophecy from reliance on the planetary revolutions, Sirenio took the additional step of disengaging prophecy from sublunary as well as from superlunary influences. More particularly, under the heading: "By what means prophecy is effected, first in the opinion of the physicians (*ad opinionem physicorum*), and then of the Catholic faith,"⁵⁰ Sirenio declared prophecy to be independent of both sublunary melancholy and of superlunary Saturn to which melancholy is astrologically subject. Owing to Sirenio's extended arguments on behalf of this thesis, they are here deserving of an extended explication.

* * *

With regard to the medical opinion of divination indicated in the heading of his excursus, which he proposed to counteract with a theological one, Sirenio established that his use of the term *physicus* refers to a broader range of theorists than corporeal physicians,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 14, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Giulio Sirenio, *De fato libri novem* (Venice: Ex officina Jordani Zileti, 1563), lib. VII, fol. 106'. Sirenio, a native of Brescia, inexplicably escaped Thorndike's notice.

referring as well to philosophers of nature who, he charged, collaborate with the physicians in subjecting the revelations of inspired prophets to the natural senses. At the forefront of those whom Sirenio took to task in this regard, to be sure, were the Aristotelians who, led by Pomponazzi, erringly assigned accurate powers of prophecy to the melancholy humor.⁵¹ But the Peripatetics were not the only target of Sirenio's criticisms in this matter. Also targeted were Platonists in the manner of Ficino who, while admittedly closer to the truth of the matter than the Aristotelians, were just as culpable of exaggerating the precognitive powers latently residing in the black bile. To underscore melancholy's limitations in this regard Sirenio distinguished inspired from natural prophecy, with the former aiming for absolute certainty in the art of prediction and the latter allowing only for high probability. In elaboration of the latter category of prophecy Sirenio set forth four causes of why some are more naturally equipped to prognosticate than others, with the cause of melancholy concluding the list.

The first cause of naturally outstanding prophetic powers offered up by Sirenio is found in the physical surroundings of the prophet, with some environments deemed to be more conducive than others to a prophetic disposition; one naturally disposed to prognostication, as Sirenio put this cause, "is of the nature of the place in which he lives, from which his mind is so affected that, being turned to frenzy, he is wont to prognosticate."⁵² The second cause in turn, anciently exemplified by Thales and Solon, is found in the exceptional ability of some men to infer future probabilities on the basis of a remembered past; this kind of prophecy, Sirenio observed, springs "first of all from art, secondly from science, and finally from experience."⁵³ The third cause of naturally induced expertise in the art of prophecy recognized by Sirenio, more controversial than the previous two because of its theological implications, is the astrological one, the proficients of which, he maintained, conjecture the future "from a celestial body, which is a natural thing, moves naturally, and behaves naturally."⁵⁴ The bulk of Sirenio's query into the causes of natural prophecy,

⁵¹ For a specific reference to Pomponazzi in this connection see *ibid.*, lib. IX, fol. 157^v.

⁵² *Ibid.*, lib. VII, cap. 2, fol. 107^r.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, lib. VII, cap. 5, fol. 109^r.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, cap. 2, fol. 107^r.

however, is reserved for the fourth-named cause “from the temperament,”⁵⁵ that is, from what pseudo-Aristotle declared in the *Problemata* to be an enkindled melancholy humor. Whereas, as perceived by Sirenio, the astrological cause put into question the Christian dogma of free will, the humoral cause put into question the radical independence of prophetic visions from the natural senses.

In Aristotle’s opinion, Sirenio pointed out, “not only all those are melancholics who are outstanding in some speculative art, such as medicine or poetry, or rhetoric, or other art of this kind (which all now count among the speculative arts), or else in some practical art, such as warfare, in which Alexander, Ulysses, and many others excelled, but also those who are illustrious in the art of prediction, such as the sibyls, the bacchae, and all those, furthermore, who are believed to be inflamed and instigated by the divine spirit.” In other words, as Sirenio’s paraphrase of pseudo-Aristotle informs us, the unusual precognitive powers stimulated by melancholy are part of a larger picture of an extraordinary imaginative capacity of melancholics that also extends to other genial abilities. The success of melancholics in foretelling the future was likened by Sirenio, with the help of the frequently cited Aristotelian analogy, to the success of a skilled marksman in hitting his target; just as an archer is more likely to manage a bull’s eye with the more arrows he aims at his target, as Sirenio reiterated this analogy, so is the melancholic better able than other humoral types to predict the future through access to a plethora of imaginary conjectures. Reconfirming Aristotle’s insight, Sirenio further reported, was Cicero, who declared that melancholics “are believed to possess something in their minds prophetic (*praesagens*) and divine.”⁵⁶ As viewed by Sirenio, however, there is a vast difference between an appearance of divine intervention in the prophetic pronouncements of a melancholic and its reality.

Faring better than the Aristotelian explanation of melancholy as a cause of keen prophetic discernment in Sirenio’s eyes was the Platonic explanation claiming rare prophetic acumen “through enthusiasm and ecstasy, or through a certain vacancy of the mind (*animae vacatio*), and through, as it is also termed, the afflatus of some divine spirit (*cuiuspiam afflatum*).” Unfortunately, Sirenio complained, Ficino’s

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 5, fol. 109^r.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 2, fol. 107^r.

recent reworking of the Platonic inspiration theory yoking it to the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius had the effect of undermining its credibility; inasmuch as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, Sirenio pointed out, the chain of reasoning applied by Ficino to the question of prophetic insight is easily broken at the link of natural input represented by the melancholy humor. But while rejecting one prong of Ficino's genial theory, that allowing for the harnessing of melancholy to divine frenzy, Sirenio had no problem accepting another prong, namely, that of melancholy's utility to the demons. As Ficino was instructed by Plato, noted Sirenio, "when the mind has been completely dominated by the imagination through the black bile or the like, it easily becomes the domicile for inferior demons."⁵⁷

In amplification of this point Sirenio freely admitted that melancholics "sometimes perform marvels exceeding the limits of their own kind (*supra suam speciem operantur*)." To the extent that they do so, however, Sirenio insisted, it is not by divine intervention as Ficino would have us believe, but "so that their demonic inspirers might be admired and that the mind under their influence might seem to project itself beyond the bounds of human nature." Of the ways in which melancholy-ridden demoniacs, by Ficino's own account, seek to deceive us into believing that their marvels have their origin in a realm "beyond the bounds of human nature," Sirenio maintained, a prominent one is by feigning powers of prophetic insight. Hence by Ficino's own account, Sirenio sarcastically retorted, "it would appear that prophecy, which we are wont to ascribe to a humor, should have been ascribed to demons."⁵⁸

For Sirenio, accordingly, demonic prophecy was no more trustworthy than natural prophecy through the melancholy humor; both belonged, not to the realm of revealed truth as does inspired prophecy, but only to the realm of imaginary appearances. As to how we are to distinguish true from false prophecy, Sirenio agreed with the Platonists that the probative test lies in the certainty with which a prediction is made: if there is equivocation in the prediction, it is to be referred to natural causation, to demonic causation, or to their combination. The Platonists, Sirenio pointed out with St. Augustine his

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, lib. VII, cap. 5, fol. 109^r.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

authority (*Civitas Dei*, IX, 22), maintain that those instructed in the art of prediction by a demon “are only equivocally termed prophets” (*prophetae aequivoce nuncupantur*), since the demons informing their imaginations lack access to the divine revelations granted exclusively to God’s chosen prophets.⁵⁹

While excluding demon-attracting melancholy as a possible mediator of prophetic illuminations, however, Sirenio did not thereby exclude the principle of mediation altogether, declaring the appropriate medium, again with St. Augustine his authority, to rest in the sense-free angels. While it is true that the angels have no more direct accessibility to the absolute truth than their demonic counterparts, Sirenio conceded in this regard, they are instructed in that truth by God before relaying it to the prophets, as a result of which, “by glancing into the divine majesty and into that mirror in which all things are reflected, they perceive nearly all temporal things even before they take place.” For this reason, Sirenio called on St. Augustine to testify, “Holy Scripture often refers to those who foresee in their capacity as honorable and holy prophets, because they rightly understand almost all things which are about to occur through instruction by the good angels, so that they regard the divine essence, and thereby become learned in future as well as in present or past things, and, by seeing them with their inner eyes, are equally able to enunciate them.”⁶⁰

Ficino, according to Sirenio, was not the first thinker of note to fall into self-contradiction by attempting to accommodate a mere natural humor to the supernatural demands of prophecy. Anticipating him in this regard, Sirenio charged, was Avicenna, who, from a Platonic perspective, “believed that the soul imbued with prophecy has been sent solely by divine providence,” and, from an Aristotelian perspective, contended that the souls of prophets also necessarily interact with their bodily functions, including among them the alienating function of melancholy.⁶¹ As reevaluated by Sirenio, however, the Avicennan theory of prophetic insight is no more successful than the Ficinian one in explaining how an ignominious natural humor like melancholy is enabled to help propel the soul of its sufferer to a place located beyond the bounds of nature.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, cap. 11, fol. 112^v.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, lib. VII, cap. 5, fol. 109^r.

If Sirenio had ended on this note we could comfortably place him in the ranks of a number of late Renaissance Platonists who, coming to our attention in the next section, no longer found acceptable the kinds of compromises they saw as sabotaging the Platonic doctrine of divinely inspired genius. Complicating this reading of his *De fato*, however, is a further chapter, under the heading: "The differences between natural and theological prophecy, and likewise between the prophet and the soothsayer,"⁶² the basic thrust of which is to caution, in light of the Peripatetic corruptions of Plato currently in vogue, that it is safer to sever philosophy from the Catholic faith altogether than to seek their accord. Much, however, like a disparager of philosophy before him who applied the same argument to prophecy, Gianfrancesco Pico, Sirenio did not hesitate to employ philosophical arguments to make his point. More particularly in relation to the present subject, he employed Aristotle's categories of the four teleological causes—material, efficient, formal, and final—to dissolve the Ficinian synthesis between the Platonic inspiration theory and the Aristotelian theory of melancholy genius.

Taking up first the *causa materialis* of prophecy, Sirenio pointed out that, "from the point of view of their subject and material," the prophets of the philosophers can be distinguished from those of the theologians by their more limited field of precognitive vision, with the sense-based prophecies of the philosophers restricted to probabilities arising out of an exceptional ability to assess temporal causes residing in nature and the prophecies of the theologians enabled to reach beyond nature to the atemporal realm of divine providence. Concerning the *causa formalis* Sirenio contended that, springing as it does from extra-terrestrial concerns, the theological version of prophecy "is only improperly termed a [natural] disposition (*habitus*)," whereas prophecy as described by the philosophers springs entirely out of one's natural constitution. Proceeding to the *causa efficiens*, Sirenio maintained that all true supernatural prophecy "is effected by a voluntary cause (*a causa voluntaria*), whereas natural prophecy also involves other efficient means." Coming to the heading of the *causa finalis*, Sirenio envisaged two different goals to which the two forms of prophecy are directed. As spelled out by Sirenio: "Theological prophecy has been bestowed upon man by God for the utility of the Church,"

⁶² *Ibid.*, lib. VII, cap. 12, fol. 113^r.

whereas, alternatively, the natural prophecy of the philosophers “has been granted man, not for the utility of the Church, but to effect the natural completion of the human intellect.”⁶³

For these reasons Sirenio conceived of prophecy in its highest form, that upheld by the theologians, not as a culmination of natural prophecy but rather as a divine illumination utterly free of natural assistance. Given, Sirenio averred, that melancholy prophecy pertains “solely to natural causes, not supernatural ones (*causas tantum naturales, non supernaturales*),” it is necessarily subject to the same uncertainties and limitations as inhere in sense experience, whereas theological prophecy, which “can be referred only to a divine and supernatural source,” is radically independent of the senses. It followed for Sirenio from the theological premises of his argument that “a natural cause is thoroughly changeable, sometimes disappearing altogether, and sometimes both advancing the effect which has been ordained for it to produce and sometimes hindering that effect,” whereas, at the opposite end of the spiritual spectrum, “given that the divine will is the cause of theological prophecy, it is never possible to obstruct it, nor for it ever to become weakened with decay or to dissipate.”⁶⁴ According to Sirenio’s way of thinking natural prophecy cannot possibly contradict the laws laid down by nature, whereas prophecies characterized as such by the theologians are often found to circumvent natural law.

Sirenio’s distinction between theologically and philosophically conditioned prophecy represents a foremost Renaissance example, within fideist guidelines resembling those of Gianfrancesco Pico before him, of how the marriage between theology and philosophy could no longer be readily sustained under the extreme exigencies of late Renaissance events. Nevertheless, to be brought out in the following section, the line of reasoning adopted by Sirenio in his analysis of the prophetic act did not necessarily entail a repudiation of philosophy’s ability to undergird Christian faith altogether. It could just as readily be employed by the Platonists among the dogmatic philosophers themselves to shore up their side of a developing schism between their supernaturalist rendition of genius and the naturalist rendition of the Aristotelians.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

What prevented Sirenio from wholeheartedly placing himself on the Platonic side of this philosophical divide was his belief that the Platonic inspiration doctrine had been so debased under Ficinian auspices as to make it no longer salvagable. By erroneously viewing the Platonic frenzies through Aristotelian-jaundiced eyes, Sirenio concluded, Ficino had made it safer for a good Christian to forgo philosophy altogether than to risk consigning the immortal soul, the solid rock on which a credible genial theory necessarily rests, to the dustheap of the mortal senses. Yet, as will now be established, others of Sirenio's time no less hostilely disposed to the intermingling of Platonic and Aristotelian principles did not find it necessary to go to that fideist extreme, choosing instead to remain within Platonic guidelines. Sirenio's disjunctive analysis of prophetic genius, that is to say, corresponded to a disjunctive trend taking place within Platonism itself—this reflecting a resolve on the part of some of its post-Ficinian representatives to purge their favored Christian philosophy of Peripatetic adulteration.

C. *The Platonic Rupture*

In a dialogue disputing the primacy of the civic and solitary lives Ortensio Lando (1512–1560), a refugee from the Milanese Eremites of St. Augustine who ended his days in republican Venice, presents what appears to be very convincing arguments in discouragement of the *vita solitaria*. On his side of the debate the unnamed critic of solitude declares holy writ as better sustaining a case for civic engagement than disengagement; after all, he exhorts, “God did not create our father Adam so that it would suit him to be alone, but rather gave him an aid resembling himself.” And if faith is not sufficient by itself to persuade his opponent of this truth, the civic proponent continues, lending it gentile corroboration is the Aristotelian maxim declaring man to be a political animal. As for another famous Aristotelian saying likewise relevant to the present topic—that declaring a man alone to be “either a beast or a God,” Lando's civic spokesman sarcastically reprimands his opponent, lest he seek to pre-empt this maxim to his own advantage, that “since you are not a god, do you wish to be taken for a beast?” While granting that many of the Christian fathers withdrew into solitude, he claims that “they did not do so for any other reason than to flee the cruel tyranny of the

enemies of Jesus.” During the present day, however, his adversary is reminded, these conditions no longer hold, for which reason the depressed and anxiety-ridden solitary, “rather stunned, deprived of common sense, frantic, and weighed down by hellebore,” would do well to exchange Saturn for Jupiter.⁶⁵

It is, however, the argument on behalf of the solitary life, preceding this one in the text and seeming to be countermanded by it, that appears to stand as Lando’s own, indicated by the dialogue’s title in a 1555 re-edition: “Discussion between a knight-errant and a solitary man in which is treated the deceits and perfidies of the world, demonstrating that there is not to be found goodness in a single state, together with praise of the pursuit of the solitary life.”⁶⁶ Countering his opponent’s scriptural references with others upholding the virtues of removing oneself from society, the advocate of solitude invokes the examples of Adam, “who, as a solitary, was without defect until he came into companionship, whereupon he fell into the abyss of miseries and into the depths of anxieties;” of Abraham, who, “living as a solitary, many times engaged in intimate conversation with God;” and Christ himself, who betook himself into solitude in preparation for preaching to his disciples from the mount. These and many other biblical exemplars are invoked by Lando’s solitary to instruct his readers “to pray alone and . . . to flee the agitated theaters, the populous city, the litigious squares, the seditious towns, and the exceedingly loquacious villages.”⁶⁷ And if these biblical authorities are not enough to change the mind of his opponent, the solitary further counters the ancient gentile references of his opponent with others upholding the primacy of solitude over civic engagement.

Lending pre-Christian buttressing to the solitary’s argument, for one, was the ancient gentile sage Pythagoras, who “apprehended many great secrets pertaining to metaphysics in a cave.” Or as further examples: “Observe that the ancient poets were always accustomed, after feeling that they had been moved by the divine frenzy and that they were agitated and moved by a celestial force, to with-

⁶⁵ Ortensio Lando, *Ragionamenti familiari di diversi autori, non meno dotti, che faceti* (Venice: Al segno del Pozzo, 1550), fol. 31^{r-v}. For the identification of Lando and the context for this work see Grendler, *Critics*, pp. 21 ff.

⁶⁶ Lando, *Varii componimenti* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1555), p. 89. Grendler, *Critics*, p. 147, so unquestionably accepts the argument on behalf of solitude as Lando’s own that he does not even present the opposing one.

⁶⁷ *Ragionamenti*, fols. 28^r, 30^{r-v}.

draw to certain groves and wild places, and were persuaded that by no other means could they elicit from their breasts any subtle and bountiful verse."⁶⁸ If such men could be called mad, Lando suggested, it was in the good sense of madness indicated by Plato, who associated such poetic frenzy with the frenzy of the prophets. As he capsulized this notion in one of thirty "paradoxes" (*paradossi*) comprising his best known work: "Madmen are truly a celestial thing, for, being full of the divine madness, they possess a spirit of prophecy."⁶⁹

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the attitude captured in the above paradox generated an entire genre of *pazzia* literature.⁷⁰ What distinguishes this group of tracts from the earlier cited ones in this genre, however, is that, whereas they praised the divine frenzy doctrine in connection with an elevated appreciation for the powers of the human intellect, these, influenced by Erasmus' *Encomium moriae* but also evidently drawing on themes in Gianfrancesco Pico's *Examen vanitatis* and Agrippa of Nettesheim's *De vanitate*, rather tended to devalue the intellect. Common threads of this literature consists of a satirical rejection of book learning in favor of direct experience—of a preference, as put in the language of books, of "things" (*res*) over "words" (*verbum*), with the latter castigated as mere pedantry—and of the primacy of faith over reason in theological matters.⁷¹

If Plato at times was caught up in Lando's anti-intellectual vituperations, it was apparently owing to what Lando considered to be a pedantic over-formalization of his ideas that he saw as coming to reign over the academies.⁷² But whereas, despite this criticism, Lando found support in Plato for his advocacy of the *vita solitaria*, he

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 28^v.

⁶⁹ Lando, *Paradossi*. . . (Lyons: G. Pullon da Trino, 1543), I, no. 5, fol. 26^r. On this tract see Grendler, *Critics*, pp. 29–31.

⁷⁰ See above, pp. 252–53.

⁷¹ On these trends in cinquecento thought see Grendler, *Critics*, esp. pp. 111, 140–46, 156–61. Cf. Nauert, *Agrippa*, esp. pp. 209 ff. However, pp. 159–60, Grendler makes a distinction between the pious motives of Gianfrancesco and Agrippa and those of the "poligraphi," including Lando, constituting the crux of his study, the latter who (pp. 162 ff.) tended to pose Utopian antidotes to Italy's problems rather than to attempt fideist escapes from its turbulences. On Lando's first Italian trans. of More's *Utopia*, see Grendler, pp. 32–33, and concerning a contemporary "Utopian" approach to the same problems by Antonio Francesco Doni (1513–1574), Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 209–13. Nevertheless, concerning Lando's flirtation with Protestantism, facilitated by a number of transalpine journeys, see pp. 104 ff., and Caponetto, *Protestant Reformation*, pp. 271–74.

⁷² On Lando's criticism of Plato, see Grendler, *Critics*, p. 150, and on his criticism of the academic movement, pp. 140–42.

did not look for comparable support in Aristotle, who rather served his civic spokesman for arguments against solitude. The response of Lando's solitary to the admonition by his civic opponent that, being "weighed down by hellebore," he would best forsake Saturn for Jupiter, far from being one of co-opting that counsel and using it to his advantage by locating genial powers, as maintained by Aristotle, in the black bile, was rather one of appealing to a Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy without consideration of natural consequences.

Another contributor to the *pazzia* genre during this turbulent period, however, was more forthright about what he considered to be an underlying contradiction between the two genial theories, Platonic and Aristotelian, with only the Platonic version identified with alienation in its good sense and the Aristotelian version identified with the object of his ridicule. Railing against a "universal madness" (*la pazzia in universale*) that he saw as disrupting his times, Tommaso Garzoni da Bagnacavallo (1549–1599), in his tellingly titled *L'hospitale de' pazzi incurabili*, graphically described its monstrous morphology with help from ancient mythology. The epidemic under consideration, Garzoni exclaimed, "is more shapeless than the serpent of Cadmus, more bestial than the Chimaera, more poisonous than the dragon of the Hesperides, more injurious than the monster Cerberus, more terrible than the Minotaur of Theseus, and more horrible than . . . Geryon of the three heads." So repugnant are its features, Garzoni contended, that "the Harpies were never so stinking as this madness, nor the Bull so pestiferous to Hercules, nor the marine monster so harmful to Hesione." Entering into the brain cavities of its victims, Garzoni continued his tirade, the infirmity assuming these repulsive features "obfuscates the imaginative faculty, perverts the thoughts, alienates the mind, and corrupts the reason, preventing a man from discerning, from choosing, from speaking, and from performing things upon which he has set his mind;" hence its wretched sufferer, "plagued by turbulent phantasms and with vacillating spirits, with a sick judgment, with a brain agonizing within an empty head similar to a dry melon, roams about vainly as if he were a broken-down race-horse, pursuing foolish goals which are no less pitiful than ridiculous." This, the writer lamented, is the condition "currently being disseminated and scattered through all the provinces and countries of the world."⁷³

⁷³ Tommaso Garzoni, *L'hospitale de'pazzi incurabili* (Ferrara: Appresso Giulio Cesare

Given the unflattering portrait of the *pazzia in universale* depicted by Garzoni, the question is raised of why efforts to stem its spread had met with such great resistance by many of his contemporaries. Garzoni's answer is that, instead of being despised as it should, the contagion depicted had been made fashionably respectable by the foolish claim by many in its grasp that it was a mark of their superiority; as a result, Garzoni complained, no matter how crazed or stupidly insensate a sufferer of this madness might become, "all the wiser does he hold himself to be."⁷⁴ By what absurd reasoning, Garzoni puzzled, did the victims of this epidemic come to such a ridiculous conclusion, the result of which was to transform what should have been viewed as a sickness to be cured into a purported gift of the gods? It was the result, he charged, of a misplaced identification of their infirmity with the condition of melancholy that Aristotle had proclaimed to be a distinctive sign of an exceptional mental facility. Garzoni, on the other hand, declared his preference for a version of this alienated condition rendered by the French medical writer Jean Fernel (1497–1558), who maintained, in Garzoni's paraphrase, that those afflicted by melancholy "either think or speak or cause absurd and repulsive things that are far removed from reason and good counsel."⁷⁵

Among the more conspicuous symptoms of the melancholic vogue lampooned by Garzoni was a widespread disposition to misanthropy, a penchant, he pointed out, typically recognized by the medical texts

Cagnacini), 1586, discorso 1, fol. 3^{r-v}. French trans.: *L'hospital des fols incurables* . . . , trans. François de Clarier (Paris: Chez François Julliot, 1620). Having studied law and logic at Ferrara and Siena earlier in his career, Garzoni later added philosophy and theology, and in 1566 assumed the habit of the Lateran Congregation of Canons Regular at Santa Maria di Porto in Ravenna. On Garzoni's role as social critic see Grendler, *Critics*, pp. 191–93, citing Lando, despite their shared ground as social critics, among the targets of his satirical attack. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965; New American Library [Mentor], 1967), p. 39, points to this writing as illustrating, in the history of insanity, the shift from the floating insane asylum—the "mad ship" or *stultifera navis*—to a stationery "Hospital of Madmen" or "Madhouse." Foucault's ideas on this subject are critically reassessed by H.C. Erik Midelfort in his essay "Madness and Civilization in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault," in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J.H. Hexter*, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), pp. 247–66.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, disc. 3, fol. 10^v. The source of this definition is found in Fernel, *Opera medicinalia* (Venice: Apud Franciscum de Portonaris, 1566), lib. V, cap. 1, p. 322. For a summary of Fernel's medical career see Thorndike, *Magic*, V, 556–60.

as “a desire for solitude and hatred for the company of men.” It is entirely fitting, therefore, Garzoni counseled, that those under its sway should be locked away from society in a “hospital of melancholics and savages” (*hospitale de’maniconici, & selvatici*), with its inmates attended by the god Jupiter, said to rule, with his accompanying “jovial” planet, over civic life.⁷⁶ Under the force of this injunction Garzoni entreated Jupiter “to cheer these sufferers, to console these afflicted people, to relieve these melancholics of their anguish and of their torment, as is fitting to you who, like your favorable star, have been delegated to perform this role.”⁷⁷ Another prominent symptom of melancholy brought out by Garzoni, however, seemingly goes to the opposite extreme of misanthropy, since it is most notably observed in lovers. “The insane lover,” charged Garzoni in a discourse specifically addressed to this subject, “applies himself, with his foolish musings, to building castles in the air, imagining to himself all the day long what the briefest and shortest ways might be for the fulfillment of his lecheries, which considerations render him disquieted, afflicted, anguished, and tormented through all the hours.”⁷⁸

One kind of love madness in particular catching Garzoni’s eye was the love for magic. As Garzoni had garnered from this strain of post-Ficinian Platonism, a notion of the “magic of love”—of *magia amoris*—appearing in many of the love tracts could just as easily be reciprocally interpreted as a “love of magic”—of *amor magiae*. For Garzoni there was a direct correlation between the melancholic vogue he had so acerbically mocked in his *L’hospitale* and the comparable vogue for magic, their connecting link consisting of a love for objects that lie beyond the scope of ordinary human accessibility. With this aim in mind, Garzoni chided, the melancholy lover “meditates on enchantments, on sorceries, on charms, upon every type of magical witchcraft, desiring to make himself invisible with the stone of Gygis and with the herb of Elitropia, and to possess the secrets of Pietro d’Abano, Cecco d’Ascoli, or Antonio de Fantis, and to know how to make use of the key of Solomon, and how to compel the demons through conjurations.” Of the magical studies Garzoni saw as espe-

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, discorso III, fol. 10^rv.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 13^r.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, discorso 18: “De’pazzi d’Amore,” fol. 42^v.

cially favored by such a lover, two were especially prominent. "On the one hand," scoffed Garzoni, "he meditates on alchemy, which, by giving him silver and gold, may be able to enrich him of his love; on the other hand, he meditates on the false Cabala which, by virtue of unknown names, he may be able to persuade his lady to that which he desires."⁷⁹

As spelled out to greater length in his kindred *Theatro de . . . diversi cervelli mondani*, it was above all the art of alchemy that served Garzoni as a suitable vehicle for summing up the folly of magical lovers. The practitioners of alchemy, Garzoni charged, operate under the foolish supposition that, like Daedalus, they can mount the heavens with a single leap. Ridiculing these lovers of the arcana as "alchemical hot-heads" (*cervellazzi alchimisti*), Garzoni complained that, "with their foolish thoughts straining to a high place, they are desirous of performing great things with small ones, of extolling themselves with vileness, of enriching themselves with poverty, of sublimating themselves with misery, of attaining to the highest state of health with infirmity, and of making themselves blessed with deprivation, thereby being made instantly happy." In this manner, Garzoni lamented, alchemical lovers go about the world "continuously distilling and lambicating their brains—this so that they might draw themselves out of their miseries, become all of a sudden *fortunati*, and, rising on the wings of Daedalus, move from a low and vile state to rest in the vicinity of Heaven."⁸⁰

In some ways Garzoni's satirization of the cinquecento melancholy vogue appears to put him in the same company as fideist deprecators of philosophy like Gianfrancesco Pico, Mancini, and Sirenio, together with those, like Lando, who made a token use of Plato's frenzy doctrine to achieve much the same result. A more studied view of his genial outlook, however, will show him to be more comfortable in the company of late Renaissance Platonists desirous, not of purging the Christian faith of philosophy, but rather of purging their Platonic principles of Aristotelian encroachment.⁸¹ Two

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* On D'Abano see above, p. 20, and for the identity of Cecco d'Ascoli and Antonio de Fantis, Thorndike, *Magic*, II, 948 ff., and VI. 47.

⁸⁰ Garzoni, *Il teatro de vari, e diversi cervelli mondani* (Reggio: Appresso Hercoliano Bartoli, 1585), disc. 49, pp. 249–50.

⁸¹ Emphasizing Garzoni's dependence on Mancini in this regard, identified in his

considerations in particular pertaining to the genius question encouraged him to assume membership in this consciously anti-Peripatetic Platonic school.

The first consideration helping to drive Garzoni into a consciously anti-Peripatetic position was his presumption that lying behind the “universal madness” caricatured in the foregoing passages was something much more serious than mere foolishness of behavior. Far from serving as a highly propitious condition for the dissemination of genius as the Aristotelians maintained, Garzoni railed, the epidemic of melancholy rather serves as a highly propitious condition for the ingress of the Devil into the world; as this danger is pointed up in his *Serraglio de gli stupori del mondo*: “the effect of melancholy is known as the property of the demon, which freely mingles with this humor, since its nature is one of bitterness and turbulence, and therefore not a little adapted and disposed to demonic use through the malignant diabolical arts.”⁸² The second consideration pushing Garzoni into a sharply anti-Peripatetic stance was his conviction that there are instilled in the minds of a chosen few a capacity for prophetic acuity that is so keen that it can be explained only by reference to a divine revelation. While sharing his opinions in these areas with the skeptical fideists, his choice of language in expressing them tells us that he still found a place for philosophical speculation in his thinking. Connecting the two themes, demonic and prophetic, in Garzoni’s mind was his supposition that the demons lure unsuspecting souls into their grasp by deceiving them into confounding a demonically instigated prophecy with a divinely inspired one.

In keeping with a Platonic way of assessing these two themes, Garzoni extended the “demonological” horizon of his genial outlook to embrace good as well as evil spirits. Queried Garzoni with this broader meaning of demonology in mind: “From what is born the spirit of divination in prophets? Is it from the heavens, from the melancholy humor, from a terrestrial exhalation, or from demons?”⁸³ Passing in order through these four separate explanations of the div-

margins as “Monsig. d’Alessano,” is Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 39, 43. Garzoni’s distinctively Platonic brand of anti-Aristotelianism, however, as distinct from Mancini’s more straight-forward fideist brand, offers a philosophical dimension to the genial issue missing in Mancini.

⁸² Garzoni, *Il serraglio de gli stupori del mondo* (Venice: Appresso Ambrosio et Bartolomeo Dei, Fratelli, 1613), p. 505.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

inatory art, Garzoni settled on the last-named one, indicating as he did so that he was taking the word "demon" in the broad sense of supermaterial intermediary of divine virtue. "Catholics certainly agree," as Garzoni sought to validate his orthodoxy in this regard, "that demons, and not other influences, bring about prophetic vaticination." Or as he made the same point another way with the aid of an analogy: "Just as air becomes momentarily illuminated by the sun, so does the prophet become momentarily elevated to predictive powers by demonic afflatus."⁸⁴

It should not surprise us to learn, accordingly, that a name that was anathema to many of the Platonists, Pomponazzi, prominently figured in Garzoni's discarded alternatives to the demonic one. Taking to task one whom he considered to be a foremost purveyor of the insanity that was going on around him, Garzoni faulted Pomponazzi for promoting the first two erroneously proffered prompters of prophetic acumen indicated above: the planets and the natural humors. "Making a profession of Aristotle and held in high esteem in philosophy in his day," Garzoni lamented, Pomponazzi mistakenly concluded "that the occult celestial influence and virtue causes prediction and divination in the prophet."⁸⁵ This faulty astrological rendering of the prophetic art, contended Garzoni, can be soundly repudiated not only with the help of Plato, who said nothing about planetary mediation of the divine frenzies, but also with the further assistance of Pomponazzi's own favored philosopher, Aristotle, who was equally reticent about a part played by the stars in the instigation of vaticinal powers. Regretfully, Garzoni charged, Aristotle simply substituted one foolish explanation of rare prophetic ability with another, maintaining, again with Pomponazzi's stamp of approval, "that ecstasies foresee many things, not through any superior influence which descends from above to below, but by means of the melancholy temperament and complexion." Against what he deemed to be Aristotle's mistaken view of prophecy Garzoni countered that "divination is a spiritual matter, and therefore it is virtually impossible that it can be caused by the melancholy humor."⁸⁶ Or, as Garzoni put the same consideration in broader form relevant to the entire compass of genial activities, of which lucid prophetic insight

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 292, 295.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 284–85, 289.

constituted for him one of the more salient cases in point: “the melancholy humor is not a spiritual, but a material thing” (*l’umor melancolico non è cosa spirituale, ma materiale*).⁸⁷

Faring no better than the astrological and melancholic explanations of prophecy for Garzoni was the third-named explanation, given currency through the pages of Plutarch, assigning it to fumes arising from subterranean caverns. The inadequacy of this theory, Garzoni noted, is demonstrable both inductively and deductively. Inductively, it can be demonstrated that most prophecies are evinced in localities far removed from gaseous caverns, and deductively it can be demonstrated that an attempt to refer the gift of prophecy to “a breath or vapor of the earth” falls into the same reductionist fallacy as that referring it to melancholy by implying that a mere natural cause can give rise to a spiritual effect.⁸⁸ For Garzoni only the fourth explanation, the “demonic” one, was capable of satisfying the supermaterial, spiritual requirements of prophecy. Given that “the Aristotelian method would easily remove every Platonic reason for demons,” and given further that one subscribing to that method “does not know another route in his philosophy for deducing abstract substances than by the way of celestial movement,” Garzoni voiced his strong preference of the Platonic over the Peripatetic exegesis of genial acumen on both counts.⁸⁹

This is not to say, of course, for Garzoni any more than for other patently anti-Peripatetic Platonists of his day, that a view of divinely inspired genial powers excluded participation by the senses. Plato, Garzoni observed in his *Serraglio*, “declares in his *Phaedrus* that prophecy pertains to knowledge, mystery to the affections, poetry to the hearing, and love to the sight.”⁹⁰ This interpretation of Plato’s words by Garzoni suggests that human genius, even when it is referred by a given writer to a supernatural origin, in some fashion necessarily comes into conjunction with the natural senses. All the contributors to the debate over the origin of human genius agreed on this fundamental point. Where they disagreed was whether the natural senses, together with the bodily humors upon which they depend, are potentially active participants in genius or its mere passive effects.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 285–86.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 290–91.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 294. Reference is to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, esp. 248E. Cf. *Ion*, 533–34E.

It is perhaps under the sway of considerations like this that Garzoni at times seemed to temper the astringency of his anti-Peripatetic attacks, conceding at one point in his query into prophecy, for example, that “in this tenet it is not necessary to make use of Aristotle against Plato or of Plato against Aristotle, but only of the natural light (*ma solo del lume naturale*).” In what appears to be the same conciliatory spirit Garzoni even recognized a certain vaticinatory property residing in melancholy, conceding that “an occult virtue resides in melancholy through a natural property,” and again, that, “in the Peripatetic manner, the melancholy humor, as the mediator of the conjecture in which it resides, possesses the power of divination.”⁹¹ While this momentary concession to Aristotle appears to savor of Ficino, however, Garzoni’s overall perception of human genius more markedly reflects a great sea change that had taken place in the intervening years finding Plato and Aristotle to be, not philosophical collaborators on the subject of human genius, but philosophical opponents.

For Garzoni as for contemporary anti-Peripatetics like Mancini and Sirenio, the Aristotelian theory of melancholy genius was epistemologically deficient in explaining the kind of mental acumen required of a genuinely inspired prophet. Where Garzoni departed from Mancini and Sirenio on this question was in this opinion that a rejection of Aristotle did not necessary entail a rejection of speculative philosophy altogether, since the alternative philosophical system of Plato could be shown to overcome the deficiencies of its Peripatetic counterpart. So far as a choice needed to be made between the respective genial theories of Plato and Aristotle, so Garzoni freely admitted, “I believe to be more truthful the Platonic position.”⁹²

Additionally accepting the Platonically based thesis that poetry is at heart prophecy in verse form, Garzoni extended his view of inspired genius to embrace the poetic art. As Plato sagely instructs us, Garzoni noted, rare powers of poetic invention no less than those of prophetic insight are referable to a divine frenzy free of natural encumbrances. With this understanding of poetic creativity in mind, Garzoni maintained, Plato “posits its unmediated dependency on an

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 391–92. Ironically, among the past authorities invoked by Garzoni to lend backing to his preference for Platonism was a scholar better known for his Aristotelian studies, St. Thomas Aquinas.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 392.

immaterial substance, called by him divine, since it transcends the substance of what is here below."⁹³ In agreement with the Platonic genial theory, then, but one now extricated from Peripatetic entanglements, Garzoni viewed the poetic frenzy, like the prophetic frenzy to which it is akin, as bypassing not only the planets in its descent to the human soul, but also the melancholy humor commonly believed to operate its effects under the influence of planetary Saturn.

With his principal focus on the transcendent demands of the prophetic act, Garzoni made it clear that he took issue with only one component of the Ficinian genial doctrine—that presuming to find in natural melancholy a secondary instigator of extraordinary mental sagacity and prowess. Garzoni was but one of a number of Platonically conditioned writers during this period—if one of its more vehement in his choice of language—to reject what they saw as an unsuccessful attempt to harness an ignominious natural humor to the heavenly generated frenzies. Even as he parodied the vogue of melancholy during his day, which he perceived as bearing underlying affiliations with the vogue of magic, Garzoni left no doubt that he considered the Platonic inspiration theory to belong, not to the prevalent disease of his age, but rather to its cure. It was a view, as will now be established, which he shared with a number of others of his time who were intent, not on forging a union between the Platonic and Aristotelian genial doctrines as Ficino had it, but in clarifying their inherent incommensuration and incompatibility.

* * *

Caught up in the second wave of Platonism washing over his age, the Sicilian cleric Pietro Calanna (1531–1606), in his *Philosophia seniorum sacerdotia et platonica*, extolled “the divine frenzy, which is transmitted to us by God from Heaven.”⁹⁴ Likewise in the expected manner of the Platonists, Calanna distinguished this salutary form of alienation, “by means of which one is borne beyond the ordinary customs of life (*qua extra consuetam vitae institutionem quis rapitur*),” from an injurious form “arising from disease” (*a humanis morbis*). What set Calanna apart from Platonists in the first wave, however, putting him into common cause with his younger contemporary Garzoni,

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁹⁴ Pietro Calanna, *Philosophia seniorum sacerdotia et platonica*. . . (Palermo: Apud Io. Antonium de Franciscis, 1599), cap. 5, p. 18.

was his unwillingness to endow natural melancholy with the kinds of salutary virtue he assigned to divine frenzy, identifying it instead with the diseased state from which a soul "borne beyond the ordinary customs of life" seeks release. For Calanna as for Garzoni, the genial act most accurately attesting to the basic disparity between divine frenzy and melancholy was prophetic insight. "Our philosophy," Calanna asserted, "teaches us that it is not by vicious dementia and frenzy of a kind arising from a diseased mind which possesses something precognizant within itself (*habere aliquid praesagiens*), as we read in the thirtieth of Aristotle's problems concerning those suffering from melancholy and the black bile."⁹⁵ On the contrary, Calanna argued against what had become a widely propagated claim of his day, unobstructed precognitive ability is permitted only in minds free of melancholic disturbances.

Another late Renaissance Platonist to employ the prophetic act as a device for an attack on Aristotle's genial theory, the Urbino canon regular Giovanni Battista Segni (d. 1610), discounted melancholy in his *Trattato de'sogni* as a constructive aid to the divine frenzies for two reasons, both pointing to the unreliability of any predictions produced with the help of the black bile. The first reason is that melancholy, being a favored natural medium for the demons, is commonly utilized by them to counterfeit divinely instilled revelations; a demon, as Segni made this point, "being crafty and subtle, with God's permission enters into the bodies of melancholics and frenetics and causes them, especially in dreams, to say and do remarkable things by deceiving those who listen to and tolerate them."⁹⁶ The second reason offered by Segni for melancholy's unsuitability in assisting prophecy is that, even when it is found to operate free of demonic agency, it induces the mind to confuse phantasms of the imagination for true prophetic insights.

If a choice had to be made between a demonically incited melancholy and melancholy working independently of demons, Segni saw the natural humor working alone as providing the more trustworthy option, the explanation being that, while the demons deliberately deceive us by their false prophecies, melancholics, as Aristotle correctly observed, "often dream and prophesy truthfully, because in

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

⁹⁶ Giovanni Battista Segni, *Trattato de'sogni* (Urbino: Appresso Bartholomeo Ragusii, 1591), cap. 1, lett. I, p. 10.

them the impression of the images is very vehement, and they sleep less deeply than others.”⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Segni insisted, even this more reliable form of natural prophecy, having been arrived at through an apprehension of probable rather than certain causes, should not be confused with a higher form of infallible knowledge deriving from divine revelation. Determining the former kind of knowledge to be acquired through the corporeal senses, Segni determined the latter kind to be acquired through a purgative process by means of which the soul finds escape from the bodily senses.

At the heart of his dispute with Aristotle’s genial theory, Segni made clear in his treatise on dreams, lay a dispute over epistemology. “That is not always true which the philosophers declare,” Segni noted in this regard, “namely, that ‘there is nothing in the intellect which has not first been in sensible bodies.’” But Segni did not on that account, as some others faced with a similar quandary over the demands of prophecy, reject philosophy altogether as a guide to his thinking, discovering in Plato an epistemological rejoinder to Aristotle’s empiricism that he held to be fully compatible with the teaching of the Church on this subject. “When the soul, with the mind atuned and with a certain divine aid, is seized and elevated to a place outside the body,” Segni observed, “we can safely say that it learns without any ministry of the body.” For evidence to countermand the empirical basis of the Aristotelian dictum Segni pointed out that prophetic knowledge is most likely to come to one in a state of slumber, when the senses are optimally suppressed by the mind. “It seems very clear that while we sleep, and the senses are quieted, that is, sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, and all the members are bound,” as Segni made this argument, “God makes many things manifest to us which the soul discourses on, and infuses it with many revelations of the future that are not subject to the senses, since they are neither [corporeally] present nor can be momentarily known by conjectures.”⁹⁸

More systematic than the foregoing Platonists in challenging Peripatetic principles was Francesco Patrizi da Cherso (1529–1597), a Paduan graduate who, holding successive chairs in Platonic philosophy at Ferrara and Rome during the later cinquecento, properly grasped that the main battleground of the struggle for philosophical

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, cap. 4, lett. 4, p. 53.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 1, lett. 1, p. 13.

hegemony in Europe lay in the halls of the universities. The pioneer of what he conceived of as a "new philosophy of the universe," Patrizi found the old philosophy of Plato to correspond far better to its precepts than that of Aristotle, with a key point of contention centered on the debate over genius. As in the previously treated examples of Garzoni, Calanna, and Segni, Patrizi beheld in the act of prophecy a pivotal issue around which to make his anti-Peripatetic case. It was not, however, prophecy *per se* that principally engaged Patrizi's interest in this regard. As indicated by the literary genre within which he chose to make his arguments, poetic criticism, Patrizi viewed the requirements of human genius through the lense of poetic invention which the Platonists commonly identified with powers of prophetic acumen presumed to originate in Heaven.

Like Giordano Bruno, with whom he shared outspoken anti-Peripatetic sentiments, Patrizi greatly occupied himself with the theme of the intellectual love of God, the fullest treatment of which is presented in his uncompleted *L'amorosa filosofia*. Also like Bruno, Patrizi dissolved what he believed to be an artificial distinction between the knowledge and love of God; "knowledge (*cognitio*)," he declared in his *Nova de universis philosophia* (1591), "is but a certain intimate union (*coitio*) with that which it knows."⁹⁹ Again like Bruno, Patrizi sought to integrate into his Platonically conditioned vision of nature an Hermetically encouraged appreciation for occult causes underlying the manifestly observable ones. Unlike Bruno, however, who invited the sense-based principles of Telesio into his philosophical overview, Patrizi, despite an effort by Persio to persuade him otherwise,¹⁰⁰ does

⁹⁹ Francesco Patrizi da Cherso, *Nova de universis philosophia, libris quinquaginta comprehensa* (Venice: Excudebat Robertus Maiettus, 1593), part II: *Panarchia*, lib. XV, fol. 31^{r-v}. First ed., Ferrara: Apud Benedictum Mammaellum, 1591. For an analysis of this work see Benjamin Brickman, *An Introduction to Francesco Patrizi's Nova de Universis Philosophia* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1941); Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, with this reference cited at p. 208; and Schmitt and Skinner, *Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 256-57. On Patrizi's anti-Peripatetic campaign see Thorndike, *Magic*, VI, 373-7; Randall, *Career*, pp. 207-11; Garin, *Storia* II, 661-65; and Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers*, chap. 7, pp. 110 ff. For the relationship of Patrizi's Platonism to Ficino's see Maria Muccillo, "Marsilio Ficino e Francesco Patrizi da Cherso," in Garfignini, ed. *Ficino*, II, 615 ff., holding Patrizi's eventual divergence from Ficino to have been prompted by the pressures of the Catholic reform movement. On how this developing philosophical rift impacted upon poetic theory see Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, ch. 3, pp. 399 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Persio indicates as much in the dedication to Patrizi of a tract contained in his 1590 Venetian edition of Telesio, *De naturalibus rebus libelli*, p. 2. Concerning this

not appear to have viewed them as compatible with his own appeal to supersensual illuminations. Also unlike Bruno, who admitted natural melancholy into his concept of a perpetually aspiring heroic lover of the infinite, Patrizi, following Equicola in declaring love frenzy to be at bottom “self-love” (*philautia*), displayed a far less friendly face to melancholy. As viewed by Patrizi, the love bestowed by God on man and manifested in His creation ultimately redounds back upon God as love for Himself. And just as God’s own self-love does not require melancholy for its expression, Patrizi reasoned, no more so does the self-love mirrored by God in the souls of human beings.¹⁰¹

While writings of Patrizi like the *Nova philosophia* and *L’amorosa philosophia* speak only indirectly to melancholy’s genial deficiencies, the first chapter of his *Della poetica* (1586) brings them into the open. Motivating Patrizi’s composition to this introduction to his poetics was his desire not only to counter an Aristotelian-based doctrine of melancholy genius with a Platonically based doctrine of melancholy-free divine frenzy, but also to counter a corresponding Aristotelian-based theory of poetry, sometimes found in conjunction with the Horatian rules of poetic decorum, declaring skilled poetic invention to be more a matter of rationally derived technical skill than of superrationally instigated inspiration. Thus, of the contemporary poetic critics whom he saw as deserving of correction, Patrizi placed Castelvetro at the head of his list, one who not only countered the Platonic inspiration doctrine with Aristotle and Horace, but who also contended that Plato’s appeal to divine frenzy was made only in jest.¹⁰² The object of the essay heading up his *Della poetica*, however,

dedication, see Garin, *Cultura filosofica*, p. 432. But evidence that Persio’s entreaty to Patrizi fell on deaf ears is furnished by his *Apologia pro B. Telesio adversus Franciscum Patritium*, indicated in Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 196n.

¹⁰¹ Patrizi, *L’amorosa filosofia*, ed. John Charles Nelson (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1963), dial. 3, esp. pp. 102, 111, and 113. On Equicola’s corresponding doctrine of self-love see above, p. 139. On the Hermetic component of Patrizi’s “new philosophy” see esp. Yates, *Bruno*, pp. 181–84.

¹⁰² Patrizi, *Della poetica: la deca disputata* (Ferrara: appresso Vittorio Baldini, 1586), lib. 1: “Del furore poetico,” p. 19. While not expressly naming him, Patrizi had Castelvetro in mind when, after reciting the “marvels” (*maraviglie*) claimed by many ancient writers as products of the divine frenzy, he charged that “one of the modern expositors of the poetics of Aristotle has had the impudence to deny it.” Castelvetro’s key role as a target of Patrizi’s excoriations is attested by a sprinkling of direct quotations from the former’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetica*, pp. 4 ff. On this work see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, II, 767–71, with the divine frenzy doc-

establishes that, in addition to taking issue with the Aristotelian-Horatian school of aesthetic theorists with their emphasis on technique over inspiration, Patrizi also took issue with the Aristotle of Ficino and his followers who, in his opinion, had erroneously allowed the doctrine of melancholy genius to enter into and corrupt the Platonic inspiration theory. As Patrizi saw it, the conferment of a natural humor on a supernaturally originated efflux entailed a logical absurdity.

The disjunctive way of thinking underlying the first chapter of Patrizi's *Della poetica* was anticipated by an earlier writing from his hand also touching on the subject of poetic inspiration, the *Discorso della diversità dei furori poetici* (1545; repr., 1553). As the title of this tract suggests, not only does divine frenzy in general manifest itself in a variety of modes, but also poetic frenzy as one of its four primary species, each occultly prompted, the text informs us, by a different planet of the heavens. "Versifying in one way rather than in another," as Patrizi put this idea, "comes from the affection which, in descending through the various heavens, partakes more of this than of that planet."¹⁰³ Planetically conditioned modal differences aside, however, Patrizi, in this youthful query into the subject of poetic genius, set forth two underlying requirements of all forms of poetry-making.

"To produce the perfect poet," wrote Patrizi, "there is needed two conditions: the first, genius, and the second, frenzy (*l'una dell'ingegno, & l'altra del furore*)."¹⁰⁴ As to why the first of these conditions is insufficient by itself to meet the needs of true poetry, but requires the addition of the second, Patrizi explained in terms resembling Ficino's,

trine highlighted at p. 771. Cf. Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, ch. 2, pp. 9 ff., and ch. 31, pp. 414 ff., and *Marvels and Commonplaces*, pp. 64 ff. The key role played by music in Patrizi's notion of divine frenzy is underscored by Palisca, *Musical Thought*, pp. 402-405. Concerning the further extension of Patrizi's poetic theory to the graphic arts, implied by his inclusion in his projected ten-volume *Della poetica* of a tome titled *Deca plastica*, see Weinberg, I, 776. See also II, 765, informing us that five additional mss. of the *Della poetica* were discovered by Kristeller at Parma. The assumption of ten planned volumes is based on the use of the word "deca" in each of the volume titles.

¹⁰³ Patrizi, *Discorso della diversità dei furori poetici*, annexed to *La città felice. . .* (Venice: Per Giovan. Griffio, 1553), fol. 48^v. On this writing see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 272-73. A somewhat earlier edition (1545) was mistakenly bound with Fabrini's trans. of writings assigned to Patrizi's earlier Siennese namesake (see above, p. 223n).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 45^v.

a poet untouched by divine frenzy “remains cold and stupid” (*rimane freddo & stupido*); being thereby deprived of its inflammatory powers, Patrizi pointed out, “he is unable to poetize.”¹⁰⁵ In Patrizi’s astrologically conditioned conception of poetic inspiration, however, distinguishing it from Ficino’s, no place is made for an adust form of melancholy to participate in the inflammation of genius. Indeed, this is shown to hold true even for that variety of poetic frenzy mediated by the planet Ficino most closely identified with melancholy, Saturn.

Occupying the highest of the planetary spheres, Patrizi instructed his readers, Saturn “has been placed in charge of the purity of the intellect, and of the disposition and promptness of the understanding; for this reason, whatever soul over which it has come to dominate is apt for speculation and contemplation.”¹⁰⁶ But while showing willingness thereby to extend to certain of the frenzied poets traits more commonly associated with the sober ruminations of philosophers, Patrizi did not, on that account, show a corresponding willingness to endow the same class of poets with the trait of melancholy genius commonly linked to the occult influence of Saturn. For Patrizi the adjective “saturnine,” so far as it applied to one of the astrologically mediated varieties of poetry, was not to be taken as a synonym for humoral melancholy, but rather as one of seven different ways in which the poet might succeed in liberating himself from the humor-laden body.

In whatever form it might be poetically expressed, Patrizi declared in his *Della diversità*, poetic frenzy “is either natural or supernatural (*è ò naturale, ò soprannaturale*); or, putting this another way, it is either human or divine.” In keeping with this disjunctive way of looking at his subject Patrizi drove a sharp wedge between a naturally fomented frenzy which, “as the physicians say, being born from the corrupted and impaired humors of our body, one moment raises us to the state of men and the next moment thrusts us back to the base level of beasts and savages,” and a divine fomented frenzy which “descends from Heaven, raises us above the human status, and renders us as half-angels.”¹⁰⁷ This either-or approach to the question of poetic frenzy leaves little room for the theory advanced by Ficino

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 50^v.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 47^r.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 46^v.

that poetic frenzy is capable of being joined by an inflamed melancholy humor.

In typical Platonic fashion, as brought out in the *Della poetica* of four decades later, Patrizi detected a fitting analogue for poetic insight in the insight of prophecy, a subject leading him to measure the Platonic inspiration doctrine not only against Aristotle's theory of vaticinatory incitement by heated melancholy, but also against Plutarch's theory of incitement by subterranean fumes. Treating the Peripatetic hypothesis first, Patrizi charged the Aristotelians with propagating a series of self-contradictions that did more to undermine than to support their nature-based doctrine of poetic melancholy. "If the melancholy humor, as Hippocrates earlier had taught and was reaffirmed by Galen, and all the other physicians (indeed, Aristotle did not deny it) is of a nature corresponding to the earth, and therefore is cold and dry and slow, and full of darkness," Patrizi puzzled with regard to one such self-contradiction, "by what justification is it stated in the *Problemata* that, when it is hot, it is both naturally cold and becomes hot in a manner which cannot be called natural?" Or again, if the melancholy humor, as the naturalists claim, "is cold, how can it make men amorous and wrathful, and concupiscible, which are all hot affections?" Or still again, if melancholy has the effect of making one sluggish, "how does it make men mobile?"¹⁰⁸ In sum, Patrizi observed with a note of sarcasm, the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius is vanquished on its own ground.

Instructing us in the prophetic shortcomings of melancholy, Patrizi pointed out in this connection, are not only members of the theological and philosophical professions, but also more discerning members of the medical profession, among whom he cited, as a case in point, the ancient physician Paul of Aegina (2nd cent. A.D.). Speaking of those who "predict future things, as though enthused and full of God," according to Patrizi, Paul, taking stock of internal contradictions of the Aristotelian genial doctrine like those cited above, concluded that their inspired oracular activities "owe, not to the humor, but to a power greater than human (*a podestà maggiori, che umane*)."¹⁰⁹ The same reasoning that led Patrizi to deny melancholy a role in prophecy as proposed by pseudo-Aristotle led him to deny a role to subterranean exhalations as proposed by Plutarch.

¹⁰⁸ *Della poetica*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

At the most obvious empirical level Patrizi pointed out that one of Apollo's most famous mouthpieces, the ancient oracle of Delphi, was an open air prophet without access to any underground vapors whatsoever. And at a deeper theoretical level Patrizi detected in the explanation of underground exhalations for divinatory acuity the same kind of naturalist deficit that he ascertained in the Aristotelian explanation of melancholic agitations. Therefore, as possible explanations for prophecy, Patrizi urged, we must eliminate "both melancholy and exhalation, and assign to this impulse a cause of greater power than those which are natural and human." Demonstrating the inadequacy of both of these nature-based theories of prophecy in the ancient world, Patrizi pointed out, were certain demoniacs, "first among the Greeks and afterwards in Egypt and Chaldaea, who predicted future matters, both through statues and through human mouths."¹¹⁰

As the title of his query into this topic attests, however, a nature-free capacity to prophesy was not Patrizi's primary concern in addressing this subject, but a nature-free capacity to poetize, which he, in rapport with a characteristic Platonic motif, perceived to be a versified form of prophecy. The quintessential scriptural prototype coalescing these genial functions for Patrizi was the Hebrew king David, who, he observed, "both 'prophesized' and 'poetized' the divine Psalms." And what is the lesson to be elicited from David's example? "It is not permitted," Patrizi counseled, "to mix holy with profane things."¹¹¹ Or, as Patrizi's paraphrase of this Davidic lesson can also be stated, it is not permitted to to mix divine frenzy with profane melancholy.

In ancient times, according to Patrizi, divine frenzy "was said to have raged in many poets, and to have effected marvelous things within them." This is not to say, Patrizi allowed, that the type of alienation signified by that Platonic term was not also known under other names. What the Greeks called "enthusiasm or mania," he noted, the Latins termed "inspiration, divine afflation, and frenzy;" in corresponding fashion, those labeled by the Greeks as "enthusiastics or enthusiasts, maniacals or manics, and divinely inspired

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19. In addition to Plutarch, Patrizi refers the exhalation theory of prophecy to Strabo (1st cent. A.D.).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

fanatics (*Entei*) as though God resided within them," were declared by the Latins to be "inspired by the divine spirit." At no time, however, Patrizi argued against what he perceived to be a widespread misconception of his time, was poetic alienation called melancholy by anyone save Aristotle and those, like Cicero, choosing to enlist Aristotle's vocabulary. Taking issue with Cicero's claim (*Disp. Tusc.*, III, 5) that "what we call frenzy, they [*viz.*, the Greeks] call melancholy" (*quem nos furorem, melancholiam ipsi vocant*), Patrizi countered that Plato at no time granted this equivalence of the two states, nor, for that matter, even deigned to use the medical word *melancholia* in relation to his divine frenzy doctrine.¹¹² As to how a presumption of melancholic frenzy entered into Cicero's head, Patrizi replied that it rested solely on a work only tenuously ascribed to Aristotle, the *Problemata*. Should that work, which was either written at an immature stage in Aristotle's career or authored by someone else altogether who spuriously appended his name to it, be laid aside, the Peripatetics would be deprived of the only authoritative support for their claim that divine frenzy is but melancholy genius under another name.¹¹³

In other writings more safely ascribed to Aristotle's genuine authorship, on the other hand, Patrizi detected a view of melancholy that was not nearly as highminded as that indicated in the suspect *Problemata*. "Now no longer declaring melancholy to be a cause of enthusiasm," he observed concerning these indisputably authenticated texts, "Aristotle in various passages places it in the company of those passions of the human soul which we term the affections."¹¹⁴ While agreeing that Aristotle occasionally made references in these same writings to "mania, enthusiasm, and the poetic frenzy,"¹¹⁵ Patrizi contended that no such references are to be found identifying poetic frenzy with natural melancholy. For to have done so, he reasoned, would have put Aristotle in the untenable position of turning poetic frenzy into an affection as common as any other.

In response to the question, accordingly, "from which causes the poetic enthusiasm proceeds, and how they have entered into poets,

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and how they have operated therein, and other similar questions,”¹¹⁶ Patrizi found the Platonic and Aristotelian answers to be, not in congenial harmony with one another as Ficino would have us believe, but in incongenial conflict, with the Platonic response alone perceived as meeting its supermundane demands. With the suspect *Problemata* excluded from consideration, he pointed out, the Aristotelians themselves were ultimately compelled to confess that melancholy has more in common with the inferior corporeal affections from which the poet is endeavoring to extricate himself than with the exalted mental and spiritual state to which he aspires. A very different story, however, from Patrizi’s philosophical standpoint, held for the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy, another name, as he interpreted it, for divine illumination (*illuminazion divina*) which “is able to move nature, to fill both the soul and the poem, to furnish the latter with ornament, and to form art in its perfection.”¹¹⁷

Given Patrizi’s break from what he conceived to be the tainted form of Platonism bequeathed by Ficino, the question looms of how a corresponding attraction on his part to Neoplatonic and Hermetic magic, together with the earlier cited study of astrology, played into his thinking. Patrizi’s fusion of astrological and Hermetic principles with his Platonic ones, it is true, attested to his assent to a doctrine of magical theology in many ways resembling not only Ficino’s, but also, contemporaneously, Bruno’s. The essential affiliation of magic for Patrizi, as for Ficino, was not with natural medicine but with supernatural theology, summarized in his proclamation: “And so the first and most excellent part of magic is nothing else but theology and religion, and if it is not completely true as the truth has been subsequently revealed by Christ, it nevertheless approaches more closely to that truth than all the other studies.”¹¹⁸ But while agreeing with Ficino in his association of divine frenzy with both astrology and magic, Patrizi radically sundered the “magic” of inspired poetic invention, on the model of inspired prophetic illumination, from dependency on the natural humors.

“The immortal does not participate in the mortal, nor, conversely, does the mortal enter into the immortal.” These words, gleaned by

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹⁸ Patrizi, ed. *Magia philosophica*. . . (Hamburg: Ex biblioteca Ranzoviana, 1593), fol. 20^v. Passage also found in Garin et al., *Testi Umanistici su l’Ermetismo*, p. 77n.

Patrizi from the Hermetic *Poemander*,¹¹⁹ conveyed to him a very different meaning of Hermeticism for philosophy than that earlier assigned to it by Ficino. For Ficino the *magia* advocated by the Neoplatonic and Hermetic legacies had the effect of acting as an amorous binding agent uniting the natural and supernatural realms. For Patrizi, on the other hand, the effect of Hermetic occult principles was to dissolve rather than meld the naturalist and supernaturalist spheres, thereby assisting his campaign, in opposition to the synthetical cohesion of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies indicated by Ficino, to purge Platonism of extraneous Aristotelian ingredients. If Ficino and his followers can be said to have discerned in natural melancholy marvel-working powers akin to those occultly residing in natural magic, Patrizi contrarily can be said, as part of a larger project freeing magic of dependency on corporeal nature, to have freed marvel-working genius from natural melancholy.

Similarly putting the Peripatetic genial theory to marked disadvantage in comparison to the Platonic frenzy version was Patrizi's successor in his Ferrara chair, Tommaso Giannini (1556–1638). Like Patrizi, Giannini acknowledged the need for intermediary assistance in the effectuation of human genius, and also like Patrizi he determined that natural melancholy, being immersed in senses obfuscating the illuminations of the holy spirit, fails to meet even minimal standards in the search for such a mediator. For Giannini as for Patrizi only a melancholy-free, “demonic” being, defined by the former in its widest sense as “a soul (*anima*) partaking of the rational mind and, as it were, a conciliator interposed between gods and men,”¹²⁰ could conceivably bridge the gulf separating the corruptible realm of nature and the incorruptible realm of God. In this mediating role, Giannini maintained, the demonic spirits are conveyors of what the Greeks called *mania*, and the Latins, *furor*, a form of psychic alienation subsequently declared by Iamblichus to be “nothing else than for the mind to be wholly occupied and contained by God, from which follows, as though consuming it, ecstasy and a certain alienation (*extasis*, & *alienatio quaedam*).” Further highlighting a

¹¹⁹ *Poemander*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, trans. Francesco Patrizi da Cherso, lib. I, adjoined to *Nova de universis philosophia*, fol. 5'. First ed., Ferrara: Apud Benedictum Mammaellum, 1591.

¹²⁰ Tommaso Giannini, *De providentia ex sententia Platonis liber...* (Padua: Apud Paulum Meietum, 1588), lib. 1, cap. 17, p. 89.

philological link made by Plato between the Greek words *mania* and *mantike* (= prophecy), "since only those seized by divine frenzy truly prophesy,"¹²¹ Giannini denied to natural melancholy any possible part in illuminating the dictates of divine providence.

The Platonically conditioned attack on the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius represented by writers like Patrizi and Giannini, needless to say, did not go unanswered. The conspicuous trend away from the Ficinian philosophical synthesis of a genial concept by certain of the later Renaissance Platonists, far from being merely self-generated, was coaxed by a correspondingly divisive trend on the opposite side of the philosophical ledger, for whom radical Peripatetic naturalists like Marzio, Cattaneo, and Pomponazzi had already pointed the way. It is to this opposing naturalist trend that we now turn, the effect of which, precisely opposite to that of the Platonists, is to consider genius an outgrowth of its natural constituents irrespective of purported supernatural influences. In this later phase of the Renaissance debate over the origin of genius, as in its earlier phases, we will see that, while radical Aristotelians of the Alexandrist school assuredly took the lead in the campaign to reduce genius to a natural phenomenon, they received support from certain of the Galenists who likewise tended to interpret the enigmas of life, including the enigma of human genius, in the natural terms of corporeal medicine independently of the supernaturalist terms utilized by the theologians.

D. *The Peripatetic Rupture*

"Given that the methods applicable to the study of man are more than one, I, in the present case, will follow that which is indicated in the title of the work at hand, that is, that dictated by things subject to movement. I refer to the natural method. That which is divine I leave to men who possess a higher genius and who alone occupy themselves with things divine." Thus did the Cosenza physician Agostino Doni (= Donio, fl. 1580), in the preface to the first book of his *De natura hominis* (1581), seek to protect his thoroughly nature-based speculations from the accusation that that they were in conflict with the higher claims of theology. While himself not specifically

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

addressing the genius problem, Doni, in disclaimers like this one as in a concluding *peroratio* making the same point, further discloses a possible fideist way out of the philosophical quandaries raised by an a radically naturalist assessment of the human condition that can be traced to Pomponazzi.¹²²

Doni, as it happened, opted for a Telesian analysis of nature over the inherited ones he pejoratively referred to Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen; he can be said, in this regard, to have applied, in expanded form, the heat-cold and sensualist principles to the human condition that his fellow Cosenzan Telesio had vested in the general fabric of nature. His rationale for adamantly adhering to his naturalist outlook, however, was one which he shared, without admitting it, with a school of Aristotelians who were just as persuaded as himself that natural philosophy occupies a legitimate domain of human concern independently of the theological domain. As Doni put this shared attitude in a nutshell in the preface to his second book: "He who neglects nature assuredly neglects those things made by God through which He manifests Himself. He who condemns [nature] condemns the design and the creation of God, and he who despises nature and turns his back on it in effect despises and turns his back on God Himself."¹²³ With a favored "Aristotelian" text at their disposal holding genius to be nature-based, a number of late Renaissance peripatetics found that they did not need to dispense with their traditional philosophical principles to come to the same conclusion.

A Paduan Aristotelian famed for putting Renaissance scientific method on a new footing in anticipation of Galileo, Giacomo Zabarella (1533–1589), illustrated his case with an example which, as it happened, shed light on more than the workings of science. It also shed light on the workings of a genial mind like that of Galileo gifted with the ability to penetrate the external welter of worldly sensations so as to grasp their organizing principles. The key to Zabarella's reformulation of scientific practices lay in a reformulation of logic,

¹²² Agostino Doni, *De natura hominis libri duo: in quibus, discussa tum medicorum, tum philosophorum antea probatissimorum caligine, tandem quid sit homo, naturali ratione ostenditur* (Basel: Apud Frobenium, 1581), appendix in Luigi de Franco, *L'Eretico Agostino Doni: Medico e Filosofo Cosentino del '500* (Cosenza: Edizioni Pellegrini, 1973), lib. I, pref., pp. 198–99; pp. 422–25. Italian trans. on opposing pages. On this tract, with excerpt from Doni's peroration, see Walker, *Magic*, pp. 193–94.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, lib. II, pref., pp. 298–99.

whereby the analytical method, suitable for mathematic operations, was made distinguishable from the empirical or “resolutive” method suitable for the conducting of controlled inductive experiments in the natural sciences.¹²⁴ Significantly for our purposes, Zabarella discerned in natural melancholy an appropriate paradigm for the second of his methodological precedures, the *via resolutiva*.

The resolutive method, Zabarella maintained with appeal to Aristotle, must begin with the senses before it can find passage into the intellect, since, he explained, “from the senses comes the imagination and the impression of species in the memory, following which it is made intelligible; for when the phantasy conjures up an image in the memory, it produces a species in the intellect, so that as the sense is moved by something, so is the phantasy moved by the sense, and the intellect in turn by the phantasy.” And who better can be called on to furnish testimony for this grounding of intellectual knowledge in the senses, offered Zabarella, than the physician who administers to the melancholic? More specifically, “he who, looking on Socrates, sees that he has been purged of melancholy by the hellebore, and in turn sees the same thing accomplished in Plato and in many other men, preserves these things in his memory, and is said thereby to be experienced in the diagnosis. And from this experience a universal concept forms in the intellect, namely, that all hellebore purges the black bile, which is the principle of the art, that is, of the operation of medicine.”¹²⁵

The lesson to be carried away from this illustration of the resolutive method by Zabarella, then, has ramifications going beyond those of the method itself. For it also cautions the natural philosopher, on the model of the corporeal physician with whom he shares methodological ground, to limit a diagnosis of melancholy genius like that ascribed to Socrates or Plato to the realm of natural causes.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ On Zabarella’s key part in spearheading this methodological shift in Renaissance science at Padua see Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 292 ff., and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 153 ff.

¹²⁵ Giacomo Zabarella, *In duos Aristotelis libros posteriores analyticos commentarii* (Leiden: Apud Mareschallum, 1587), lib. II, cap. 15, p. 248. Concerning the radical empiricism informing Zabarella’s reasoning cf. Simone Porzio, *An homo bonus vei malos volens fiat* (Florence: 1551) cap. 3, p. 19: “If there is no sadness within us, there are no senses. And where there are no senses, there is said to be lacking the man.”

¹²⁶ For further examples of Zabarella’s naturalist assessment of the mind see his *Liber de mente humana*, in *De rebus naturalibus libri XXX* . . . (Venice: Apud Paulum Meietum Bibliopolam Patavinum, 1590), cap. 4, p. 65, and cap. 5, p. 69.

What distinguishes Zabarella's approach to melancholy from the conventional medical approaches, however, is his belief, in keeping with the philosophical revision of its symptoms offered in the Aristotelian *Problemata*, that marvel working powers occultly residing within the humor are as capable of raising the mind to higher levels of humanity as of lowering it to baser levels of bestiality.

As one writer of this period, Giuseppe Rosaccio (d. ca. 1620), testifies, not even a reaffirmation of the human dignity theme so eloquently put to an opposite use in an earlier time by Pico della Mirandola foreclosed admission into this radically naturalist school of thought. Initially centering his argument on the witch issue in his *Della nobiltà et grandezza dell'huomo*, Rosaccio did not stop with the ignoble kind of alienation which he believed the theologians to have errantly assigned to the demons. He transferred the lesson elicited from that query to the question of genial powers in general.

Menopause better than demons, Rosaccio declared in the *Della nobiltà*, explains many of the strange traits ascribed to those claimed to be witches, the reason being that "because the course of their menstruation has come to an end, many women have become melancholics." The corrupting fumes of melancholy, according to Rosaccio, even as they impede the reason of their female victim in much the same way that dense fumes in the air block out the bright rays of the sun, instill certain other aptitudes within their brains "which cause the whole world to marvel."¹²⁷ The relevance of Rosaccio's thoroughly physiological rendering of sorcerous behavior, however, went beyond the question of demonic genius in the narrow sense, extending to favorable as well as unfavorable genial expressions. For Rosaccio even the genial ability to foresee and predict the future was no exception to this rule.

Conceding in his follow-up *Il microcosmo* that melancholy in its initially cold and dry form is unsuitable for a vigorous feat like prophesying the future, Rosaccio, with pseudo-Aristotle his unspoken authority, added that when it is ignited by the hot flames of the sanguine or choleric humors, an internal transformation is so effected that those who were previously of a lethargic and timid disposition are now "hot-headed, thoughtful, near to madness, and accustomed

¹²⁷ Giuseppe Rosaccio, *Della nobiltà et grandezza dell'huomo*. . . (Ferrara: Per Vittorio Baldini, 1598), cap. 2, fols. 5^v-6^r.

to the prediction of future things.”¹²⁸ A further striking passage from the *Della nobiltà* extends that naturalist analysis to the anguishing pursuits of the scholarly profession. “Those that study too attentively and with excessive assiduousness,” wrote Rosaccio, “are wont to be molested by melancholy, which humor, all the same, sharpens the mind and the wit (*aguzzi la mente, & ingegno*), just as does wine when it is drunk moderately (*parcamente*), though when drunk in large and powerful amounts it perturbs the mind with very great tedium.”¹²⁹ From his physiognomical perspective on genius Rosaccio did not feel further pressed to refer such a sharpening of “the mind and wit” to a divine cause located beyond the natural sphere. Pitting his view of the “dignity and grandeur of man” against the earlier one espoused by Pico was his presumption its principles lay within rather than without the confines of natural causation. If a naturally conditioned outlook like this were to find systematic philosophical support, it was far more likely to find it in the sense-based principles of Aristotelianism than in the supersensible principles of Platonism.

Despite its theoretical antithesis to the Platonic doctrine of divinely inspired genius, however, the Aristotelian-based one holding melancholy to be of sufficient force to explain genius shared a crucial feature with its mirror opposite. For the two theories, in a kind of adverse conjunction, joined forces in dissolving the synthesized theory of genius put into popular vogue by Ficino. Apparently undaunted by the troubles of Pomponazzi before them, who had been accused of throwing into doubt the sacrosanct Catholic dogmas of immortality and free will, they too at times present a fideist way out of the dilemma posed by their philosophical ratiocinations. For the likes of these, as will now be brought out *in extenso*, Aristotle’s nature-based explanations of life’s mysteries found valuable collateral support in the physiological precepts of Galen, and, conversely, Galen’s physiological explanations often found corroboration in Aristotle’s natural philosophy. Indeed, as we will now see, the resemblance

¹²⁸ Rosaccio, *Il microcosmo*. . . . (Florence: Nella stamperia di Francesco Tosi, 1600), cap. 3, p. 34. Surprisingly, however, the gift of prophecy is scarcely mentioned in two more famous physiognomic works of this period authored by Della Porta, *De humana physiognomia* and *Coelestis physiognomiae libri sex* (see above, p. 278n). Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 51–54, conjectures that this omission was likely linked to Della Porta’s campaign to proscribe judicial astrology.

¹²⁹ *Della nobiltà*, cap. 2, fol. 5^v.

between Galen and Aristotle for many of these was far from coincidental, since, in their view, Galen had absorbed a number of Aristotelian philosophical insights into his medical diagnoses.

* * *

In a medical tract appearing in the latter half of the cinquecento the Neapolitan physician Donato Antonio da Altomari (16th cent.) distinguished between a form of mania inflamed by the burning of melancholy, characterized by fever, and a fever-free form of mania described by Plato in his *Phaedrus*. Over and against the first form of feverish mania having its origin wholly from a natural disposition, Altomari conceded to a form of mania that Plato "called divination and asserted that Apollo was its inspirer."¹³⁰ Letting it be known, however, that he was leaving to philosophers the task of treating the melancholy-free form of mania described by Plato, Altomari acknowledged that his task in the writing at hand reduced to a more modest one of offering remedies to the melancholic mania described by the physicians.

Altomari's contribution to the melancholy problem illustrates that a given physician could well demonstrate familiarity with the speculations of the philosophers without committing to them. Other medical writers of his time, however, with Galen their guide, were disposed to move beyond the kind of strictly remedial approach to medicine represented by Altomari to an approach putting their medical observations in a larger philosophical context. As we might expect, a more likely philosophical system than Platonism to be viewed as amenable to this objective, since it was more at home with the dynamics of finite nature, was the Aristotelian system. For the medical writers demonstrating this tendency, the critical distinction to be made was not between a melancholy-free alienation in the sense upheld by Plato and the melancholic alienation to which the physicians applied their remedial skills, but rather between two kinds of melancholic alienation: one depressing the mind to a state of abject bestiality and the other elevating it, on the model of the ancient heroes, to a state of genial prowess, acuity, and profundity.

¹³⁰ Donato Antonio da Altomari (= Donatus Antonius Altomarus), *De medendis humaniae corporis malis, ars medica*, cap. 8, in *Opera omnia* (Venice: Sumptibus Jacobi Anieli de Maria, 1574), fol. 78'.

Of the obstacles the Renaissance medical writers needed to overcome if they were to make the transition from a medical disparager of melancholy to its philosophical advocate, one of the more perplexing is how a distempered melancholy humor can possibly lead to the kinds of highly tempered prudence and wisdom generally demanded of a philosophical sage. The answer as proposed by the Aristotelianized physician Salustio Salviano (16th cent.) was to distinguish between distempered (*distemperata*) and highly temperate (*temperatissima*) forms of melancholy, with the former relegated exclusively to the category of humoral infirmities and the latter meeting the requirements of the Aristotelian genial doctrine. In this way Salviano was able to resolve the tug and pull between two seemingly contradictory views of melancholy to which he was simultaneously drawn, the first calling for its cure and the second deeming it “a most perfect complexion” for those striving to excel commonplace mediocrity.¹³¹

Similarly walking a fine line between the remedial imperative of his profession and the wider philosophical implications of its precepts was a medical writer like Girolamo Mercuriale, who, as pointed out in a previous chapter, allowed in his *Consultationes medicae* that melancholy, while often triggering insanity in its sufferers, also occasionally induces a higher wisdom.¹³² Mercuriale’s recognition of a favorable side to melancholy, it is true, was a passing one, more an afterthought than central tenet of his medically grounded analysis. Other medical writers of his time, however, by giving more space to the doctrine of melancholy genius, appear to have taken it more seriously. Among these, as spelled out in a commentary on Galen from his hand, was the Ferraran physician Archangelo Piccolomini (1525–1586), who, with a play on words to assist him, called on Aristotle for philosophical corroboration of Galen’s medical observation that “he is adroit (*versutus*) whose mind is swiftly agitated (*versatus*).”¹³³

Admittedly, conceded Piccolomini, Galen recognized from a strictly medical point of view that melancholy is prone to make those afflicted

¹³¹ Salustio Salviano, *Variarum lectionum de re medica libri tres* (Rome: Ex typographia Jacobi Tornerii & Bernardini Donangeli, 1588), lib. III, cap. 1, pp. 202–3. On these passages see also Schleiner, *Melancholy*, p. 35.

¹³² See above, p. 193.

¹³³ Archangelo Piccolomini, *In librum Galeni de humoribus commentarii* (Paris: Apud Bernardum Turrisianum, 1556), fol. 93^v. On this reference see also Schleiner, *Melancholy*, p. 31.

by it “sad, gloomy, taciturn, unstable, turbulent, and so restless that they never are able to remain in one place for long.”¹³⁴ Nevertheless, as Piccolomini also read into the Galenic text at hand, the disadvantages of melancholy can sometimes be turned into advantages, one of its more remarkable being, as Aristotle maintained on the analogy of a skillful dart thrower, its ability to prompt accurate auguries of the future in those under its influence “because of the vehement impetus of their minds.”¹³⁵ While not citing Plato by name, Piccolomini left no doubt that it was the legacy bearing his name that Aristotle and Galen were confronting when they determined that keen prophetic skill is to be adequately explained by natural causation alone. Thus, when Galen spoke of the precognitive powers residing in inflamed melancholy, contended Piccolomini, he was referring, not to those in whom “the black bile abounds whose powers exceed the bounds of nature” (*abundat bilis nigra praeter naturam*), but rather to those in whom a natural black bile abounds (*abundat bilis nigra naturalis*) irrespective of alleged supernatural causation.¹³⁶

Another late Renaissance medical writer to combine Galenic with Aristotelian precepts, the Milanese physician Giovanni Battista Silvatico (1550–1621), answered a question posed in his *Controversiae medicae* “why melancholy produces wisdom?” by establishing three indispensable conditions allowing for that result. The first condition, he proffered, is a source of heat to ignite the initially cold and dry humor; the second condition, the moderation of the resulting adust so that it can be constructively channeled without burning out; and the third condition, a solitary space in which the melancholic sage can carry out his meditations optimally free of distractions. For the elucidation of these three primary conditions of what he termed “the clarity and acumen of genius”¹³⁷ Silvatico found a suitable analogue in the art of alchemy.

“If the diligent meditations of studious men are to be of effect,” Silvatico first of all insisted, “they are in need of continuous movement and assiduous agitation.”¹³⁸ Taking a cue from the alchemists,

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 158^v.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 94^r. Reference is to Aristotle’s *De insomniis*, III, 2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 94^r.

¹³⁷ Giovanni Battista Silvatico, *Controversiae medicae* (Frankfurt: Typis Wechelianiis apud Claudium Marnium, & Heredes Joannis Aubrii, 1601), contr. 1: “Sapientiam cur faciat melancholia?” p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Silvatico likened the fomentation of the melancholy humor to the alchemist's inflammation of metal in the laboratory; much as the alchemist's gold is improved in its purity and luminosity by the application of fire, reasoned Silvatico, so is the mind of the melancholic. The same alchemical parallel, however, also alerted Silvatico against carrying the inflammation of melancholy to excess. Just as an overly zealous alchemist can become so ardently carried away by his operations as to overheat his alchemical substance, thereby destroying rather than consummating the rarified object of his art, so can an excessively heated humor do the same; for this reason, Silvatico cautioned his readers, Aristotle "recommends that melancholy be only moderately hot."¹³⁹ Finally, a third indispensable condition for the realization of wisdom in melancholics established by Silvatico, also exemplified by the alchemists, is solitary seclusion, the reason being, he cautioned, that "those who consume and waste all their days in dancing, loving, games, dissipations, pleasures, and feasts are unable in the least to apply themselves to meditation and study."¹⁴⁰

Such clearheaded powers of mind as are made possible by a tempered adust melancholy, Silvatico further expatiated, relate not only to the immediate present, but also to the past and future. The reason for this triadic genial capacity in the atrabiliously disposed, he maintained, is that melancholics are better able than those lacking this disposition to perceive with great clarity what passes immediately before their eyes, to remember with comparable clarity what has occurred in bygone times, and, aided by the knowledge they have imbibed from their past and present experiences, accurately to predict what is to occur in times to come. Of these genial powers Silvatico concentrated the brunt of his presentation on the latter two.

Pointing out that "if nothing is impressed, nothing is retained,"¹⁴¹ Silvatico illustrated this empiricist precept with a oft-cited Aristotelian analogy. On being softened by the application of a flame, he observed, wax is easily impressed by an external image, and on becoming cooled, is able to maintain the impressed image for a considerable period of time. In the same way, Silvatico pointed out, moderately adust melancholics are easily impressed by impressions acquired during their past experiences, and, as their melancholy cools, long retain

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

those impressions in their memories. Another analogy invoked by Silvatico to support the same point likens the images impressed on the memory to the figures liberated from their marble blocks by the sculptors, whose tranquilly durable forms belie the fact that they were initially produced through fiery violence.

More problematic for an Aristotelian empiricist like Silvatico than the attribution of a lucid memory to melancholy, however, was his attribution of lucid prophetic powers. For it is this characteristic of the humor more than any other, Silvatico surmised, that had misled many into believing that a divine inspiration lay behind human genius. Melancholics, Silvatico agreed with the Platonists disseminating this view, "so excel others in their genius that they appear to have something divine within themselves (*sic excellant ingenio, ut divinum quid in se habere videantur*);" for this reason, he noted, "the Greeks called them Enthusiasts, as if they were filled with God."¹⁴² Where Silvatico sharply departed from the Platonists, however, was in his belief, with Aristotle and Galen his guides, that they had allowed a subjective desire on their part to perceive divine intervention in rare powers of prognostication cloud the objectively observable causes of those powers residing within nature.

Like Pomponazzi before him, Silvatico was not unaware of the contradiction between his logic and official church doctrine, and also like Pomponazzi, paid lip service to a fideist exit from his predicament. The upshot was that Silvatico, while not denying that prophetic insight is able to be furnished to a human being from a divine source, contended that the ability to unravel the mystery of prophetic genius belongs, not to a lowly corporeal physician like himself, but to the far more elevated theologians. While indicating familiarity with various others treating of prophecy who did not shrink from making a metaphysical leap from nature to supernature, among whom he recognized the medieval Avicenna along with more contemporary thinkers such as Ficino and Cardano, Silvatico assured his readers that he did not stand among them. Prophecy, Silvatico proclaimed in keeping with his fideist convictions, "is a gift which, through the immense bounty of the Creator and for the utility of the church, is conferred on one through the medium of an active intellect existing first of all above the rational powers of the soul, and secondly above the imag-

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

inative powers.”¹⁴³ Silvatico’s main concern in the work at hand lay, however, not with the unprovable precepts of his faith, which was the province of the theologians, but rather with the provable precepts of empirically based reason which was the province of the physicians and natural philosophers.

As in the cases of other medically grounded theorists of his age espousing an Aristotelian-Galenic perspective on genius, the limitations of Silvatico’s views were easily demonstrable, since, like others holding to a humoral interpretation of psychic alienation, he had never actually succeeded in observing the melancholy humor with his own eyes and empirically testing it for its characteristics. In truth his humoral explanation for a genial marvel like prophecy, as surely as Pomponazzi’s before him, was as dependent on a *priori* reasoning as the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy it was intended to counter. Further illustrating the limits of his philosophical method, in an age when the witch hunts were in a marked upswing, was his attitude to women.

Typical of the male chauvinism dominating his age, Silvatico placed women at a distinct disadvantage in the matter at hand as compared to men, his underlying physiological explanation being that women are of a naturally colder complexion. “As the physicians have pointed out,” Silvatico contended in support of this point, “the hottest woman is colder than the coldest man,” for which reason, “the practice of instructing women in the sciences was long ago abolished.”¹⁴⁴ On a more positive note, however, Silvatico’s anti-feminist bias, by extricating women from the category of favorable melancholy genius, also extricated them, in resistance to the extreme misogynist tendencies of the witch hunts, from the category of melancholy confederates of the demons. In this way, if more by implication than explication, Silvatico can be counted among those attempting to place a brake to the witch hysteria. His position on this subject, however, also underscores the no-win situation into which Renaissance women were commonly thrust by the controversy over melancholy genius, with women granted melancholy when it was assumed to throw the mind out of rational kilter but denied melancholy when it was assumed to act as a constructive physiological aid to the powers of speculative abstraction.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9. For the Avicenna, Ficino, and Cardano references see pp. 7, 10.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The transmission of a radically naturalist version of genius from the cinquecento to the seicento is illustrated by the *De atra bile quoad mores attinet* of Scipio Chiaramonte (1565–1653), whose thinking in this area fell under the sway of the French skeptic Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653). Calling on Galen as his authority in its preface that “the conduct of the mind follows the complexion of the body” (*mores animi, corporis temperaturam sequi*), Chiaramonte, with the subject of melancholy serving as the fulcrum of his argument, maintained that the variations of human behavior are wholly explicable by reference to natural causes.¹⁴⁵ When the black bile “is inflamed with heat,” he noted, “it produces maniacs, bacchics, and lymphatics,” whereas when the same humor “abounds in cold, it stupefies men, and makes them demented and foolish.” But that Galen was not Chiaramonte’s only source of information for this condition is also made clear in these pages. For if the inflammation of heated black bile can be kept to a modicum so that it does not carry one so afflicted into a state of insanity, he averred in terms suggestive of the Aristotelian *Problemata*, “it brings forth in us a variety of [admirable] dispositions, with some apt in practical prudence, others in the sciences, and still others in the arts.”¹⁴⁶

If one late Renaissance thinker can be said to have highlighted the danger of carrying a naturalist critique of genius to an extreme, provoking, it would appear, his burning at the stake at Toulouse in 1619 on the charge of atheism, it was the emigrè free-thinker and defrocked priest Giulio Cesare Lucilio Vanini (1585–1619). Concerning the allegation of demonic influence in particular, Vanini, in his *De admirandis naturae . . . arcanis* (1616), called on Cardano in support of his contention that there are some “who believe that they are oppressed by a demon, when they are really afflicted by the melancholy humor,” the proof of which is furnished by the observation that “when the proper purgative medicaments are summoned, their melancholy is cured.”¹⁴⁷ For the demonologists, as we have

¹⁴⁵ Scipione Chiaramonte, *De atra bile quoad mores attinet libri tres* (Paris: Apud Nicolaum & Joannem de la Coste, 1641), lib. 1, cap. 1 (proem.), p. 1. On Chiaramonte see Thorndike, *Magic*, VIII, pp. 450–51. Cf. p. 504, where Thorndike credits Naudé with prompting Chiaramonte’s composition of his melancholy monograph. On Naudé, whose main claim to fame rests on his defense of many past intellectuals accused of illicit magic, see *ibid.*, VII, 301–303.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12. Cf. cap. 3, pp. 77 ff.: “Varietates morum ex humore bilis atrae numerantur, secundum Aristotelis numerationem: Sect. 30. Probl. 1.”

¹⁴⁷ Giulio Cesare Lucilio Vanini, *De admirandis naturae reginae deaque mortalium arca-*

shown, the perceived pestilence of melancholy in their day—Garzoni's "universal madness"—could be explained by a dramatic spreading of the Devil's domain, the demonic inhabitants of which found in melancholy a useful material aid to their mischievous cunning. Vanini, on the other hand, possibly finding a suitable analogy in the theory popularized by Fracastoro of the dissemination of syphilis by corpuscular "seeds," offered a thoroughly materialist explanation for the identical phenomenon.

The epidemic of melancholy, Vanini claimed, was passed from person to person through pestiferous corpuscles (*corpusculi pestiferi*) originally carried through the air by winds and other natural forces. Its widespread havoc, he maintained, was especially prominent during the dominance of the planet Saturn, which managed to transfer its moroseness (*morositatem*), by means of these corpuscles, from the celestial to the terrestrial realm.¹⁴⁸ Relating, in this regard, the anecdote of a German who stopped attending public devotional services, Vanini gave as a reason, in keeping with his corpuscular theory of the melancholy epidemic, that in those public services "the Christians are sorrowful, and give out melancholy breath and sighs." Fearing that he would contract the disease, Vanini related, the timorous German "refused to enter that church, filled as it was by offensive vapors. For should you marvel that he would not want to attract similar offensive vapors, which might dispose him toward melancholy?"¹⁴⁹ Further contributing to the epidemic of melancholy, according to

nis libri quatuor (Paris: Apud Adrianum Perier, 1616), lib. IV, dial. 54, p. 406. As pointed out by J. Roger Charbonnel, *La Pensée italienne au XVI^e siècle et le courant libérin* (Paris: Champion, 1919), p. 302, Vanini served as an important conduit for Italian thought into France. With regard to an attack on Vanini's "atheism" by Cardinal Mersenne, which doubtlessly contributed to Vanini's untimely demise, William Hine, "Mersenne and Vanini," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (1976), 52–65, observes in agreement with our present thesis, p. 55: "Vanini writes from the tradition of Italian naturalism, based especially on the work of Pomponazzi and Cardano. . . . It was, in fact, this Italian naturalism that Mersenne called 'atheism.'" Cf. Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea*, ch. 2: "Three Italian Atheists: Pomponazzi Cardano, Vanini," pp. 28 ff., esp. pp. 58 ff.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, lib. I, dial. 14, p. 79. On Fracastoro's theory of syphilis see above, pp. 301–302n. Cautioning us against carrying the parallel too far between Vanini's view of a clearly contagious melancholy epidemic and Fracastoro's view of the syphilitic epidemic is Thorndike, *Magic*, V, 489: "Fracastoro . . . refused to regard the [syphilitic] disease as contagious, holding that it had attacked some persons who had in no way exposed themselves to it. Its spread was rather due to the corruption of the air under the influence of the stars."

¹⁴⁹ Vanini, *De admirandis naturae . . . arcanis*, lib. IV, dial. 57, p. 447.

Vanini, were the witches, who contracted their own melancholy "from these foul vapors" (*a tetrīs vaporibus*) and further propagated them by means of their abhorrent rites and practices.¹⁵⁰

In spelling out his theory of melancholy contagion, moreover, Vanini was not thinking solely on the negative, demonological aspect of this question. He was also thinking on the more favorable genial aspect encouraged by the Florentine Platonic revival. Thus, under the force of melancholy, noted Vanini, "we observe some very rude men who suddenly turn out to be outstanding in painting or architecture or a master in another such art."¹⁵¹ It logically followed for Vanini from his nature-based interpretation of demoniacs that the genial powers of melancholy poets and artists arise from the same natural causes. Indeed, in this sense putting Vanini into company with the Platonically conditioned Garzoni, he saw the positive spin placed on melancholy by many writers of his day as feeding into the very "demonomaniac" climate he was reproaching.

Time would prove Vanini faulty in his conception of how melancholy is augmented to epidemic proportions, much as it would also do so for Fracastoro's analogous theory of the propagation of syphilis by the spread of corpuscles. However, Vanini's misplaced belief in the contagiousness of melancholy had one very constructive result. The radical naturalism from which Vanini's fallacy issued was part and parcel of the climate of opinion which, culminating in Galilean and Cartesian rationalism, would finally help to bring the witch hunts to an end. On the downside, however, consistency dictated that the same way of thinking that reduced demonic genius to a mere natural phenomenon did the same for those favorable forms of genius referred by the Platonists to divine frenzy.

As extensively demonstrated in the course of the present study, one did not need to go to the skeptical extreme of a Vanini to stand up against the supernaturalist thesis of genial illumination. For the way to the same end was already paved by the Aristotelian naturalist tradition, which was rife, its Platonically compromised branch of Averroism excepted, with a pronounced reluctance to infer supernatural causes from natural effects.¹⁵² Parrying the accusation of

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. IV, dial. 60, p. 485.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, dial. 53, p. 400.

¹⁵² For evidence of Vanini's awareness of this tradition—this in a writing through which he ostensibly intended to distinguish his own magic-astrological outlook from

atheism which was all too uncomfortably close to that leveled against Vanini prior to his burning at the stake, the Peripatetic naturalists, as already pointed the way by Pomponazzi, only needed to reply that the supernaturalist explanation of genius rejected by rigorous philosophical reasoning could yet be reasserted as an article of Christian faith.

If an implicit alliance between Galenic medicine and Aristotelian natural philosophy constituted one principal avenue for countering the Platonic inspiration theory with one of melancholy genius, another avenue lay in the Aristotelian legacy of poetic invention. Within the Peripatetic movement there was a pronounced campaign afoot to extricate Aristotle's nature-based poetic theory from Plato's doctrine of poetic frenzy, a mirror opposite of the movement within the Platonic movement to extricate Plato's supernaturally based poetic theory from Aristotle's naturally based one. Having above presented the Platonic side to this dispute over the origin of poetic genius, coming to a head in the anti-Peripatetic poetics of Patrizi, we now come to the opposing Aristotelian side of the debate.

* * *

Just as the Platonists viewed rare poetic ability as belonging to a wider span of genial powers flowing out of the divine efflux, so, in parallel fashion, did the Aristotelians view poetic genius as belonging to a wider span of genial powers flowing out of a moderately adust melancholy humor. One branch of learning sharing a certain common ground with poetry in spite of its modal differences, we have seen, is philosophy; as noted, for example, by Pietro Vettori (1495–1585) in a commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, as applicable to one as to the other of these disciplines, those "prone to insanity or frenzy . . . are apt for inquiring after, and thoroughly examining, all

that of Pomponazzi to head off the inquisition against him, see his *Amphitheatrum aeternae providentiae divino-magicum*. . . (Lyons: Apud Viduam Antonii de Harsy, 1615), esp. Exercit. VIII, p. 52. Significantly, while referring to Pomponazzi in this context, Exercit. VI, p. 36, as "Philosophus acutissimus," Vanini refers to Machiavelli (p. 35), whose political naturalism corresponds in many ways to the metaphysical naturalism of Pomponazzi, as "Atheorum facile princeps." That Vanini was burned at the stake within four years of the publication of these words suggests that his detractors, despite his best efforts in this tract, read Machiavellian as well as Pomponazzian "atheism" into his own nature-based philosophy of the world.

the manners and motions of the mind."¹⁵³ The more usual affiliation of poetry claimed by its theorists, however, frequently witnessed in the course of the present study, is with prophecy. Just as the late Renaissance Platonic theorists of poetics often revolved their arguments around the art of prophecy as if it were another name for poetry, so did their Peripatetic opponents in response to those arguments.

Sharply delineating the opposition between the Platonic and Aristotelian poetic theories was Vincenzo Maggi (d. 1564), who, in a commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, informed his readers "that Aristotle in this place did not wish there to be one kind of poet only, as Plato appears to have maintained, that is to say, one seized by frenzy, but two kinds: one from frenzy and one from an acumen of genius (*quorum alterum est a furore, alterum vero ab ingenii acumine*). Therefore we see that, with regard to poets, Aristotle and Plato did not mean the same thing."¹⁵⁴ While Peripatetics responding to this divisive trend were as likely as their Platonic opponents to perceive an intersection of prophetic and poetic genial aspirations, their poetics necessarily called for a reformulation of the poetic-prophetic nexus better corresponding to the precepts of Aristotelian natural philosophy. As illustrated by a group of poetic theorists boldly articulating a consciously anti-Platonic brand of Platonism in the latter decades of the cinquecento, a thoroughly nature-based concept of poetic genius could be seen to emerge at the very heart of Ficino's Platonic revival, the city of Florence.

Aristotle, Leonardo Salviati (d. 1589) declared before an audience of colleagues in a 1564 Florentine oration, was of the opinion that some "anticipate the future in dreams, not because they are inspired, but because they are of a loquacious and melancholy nature, causing them to dream so frequently that, like one who frequently shoots with a bow and arrow, they sometimes hit their mark, guess what necessarily comes to pass, and come into contact with the truth by

¹⁵³ Pietro Vettori, *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum* (Florence: In officina Juntarum, 1560), p. 167.

¹⁵⁴ Vincenzo Maggi, *In Aristotelis librum de poetica*. . . (Venice: In officina Erasmi Vincentii Valgrisi, 1550), part. 88, annot., p. 186. This, according to Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 270, is "one of the major Aristotelian commentaries of the century." Cf. Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 164.

chance occurrence.” The same rule, Salviati asserted, applies to melancholy poets, who sometimes “hit their mark,” not by an act of divine intervention, but by a randomly lucky chance resulting from their humoral agitations. It is not by chance, therefore, Salviati entreated, that poets are often invested by their admirers with what appears to be prophetic powers, for their prophetic and poetic utterances alike issue from the same natural source. Furthermore, added Salviati, the melancholic instigation of extraordinary psychic insight, as confirmed by Aristotle in his *Problemata*, occurs not only in poetry as such, “but in all the arts,” the many varieties of which, he averred, “are to be attributed, not to miracles, but to the natural alteration of the humors.”¹⁵⁵

Joining Salviati in this opinion of poetic genius was another Florentine academician of the late cinquecento, Francesco Buonamici (d. 1604), who, regarding the Platonic frenzy doctrine, asserted that “Aristotle signals the falsity of such an opinion.” In the same regard, however, Buonamici was quick to add that his ancient mentor did not thereby, as the Horatians maintained, deny a non-rational component to poetry. “Granted that Aristotle rightly does not admit that frenzy which Plato judged to have been inspired by Apollo and the Muses,” acknowledged Buonamici, “nevertheless he judged that there is in the poet some form of frenzy.” As to its source, Buonamici answered that, far from being a heavenly one as the Platonists would have us believe, it was rather, as Aristotle teaches us, “an abundance of the melancholy humor.”¹⁵⁶

In presenting this alternative to the Platonic frenzy doctrine Buonamici understood that he could not simply leave the matter there, since the question still remained of how a cold and immobile humor can possibly lead to this amazing result. Buonamici’s reply, as we would expect, echoes the explanation presented in the relevant section of the Aristotelian *Problemata* declaring that, on becoming enkin-

¹⁵⁵ Leonardo Salviati, *Trattato della poetica*, in Luigi Manzoni, ed. *Prose inedite del Cav. Leonardo Salviati* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1873), p. 11. See also Weinberg, ed. *Trattati*, II, 603. On Salviati’s anti-Platonic poetic principles see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 33–4, 285–6, and 312–3. Salviati was a founder of the philologically oriented Accademia della Crusca in Florence.

¹⁵⁶ Francesco Buonamici, *Discorsi poetici nella accademia fiorentina in difesa d’Aristotile* (Florence: Appresso Giorgio Marescotti, 1597), p. 152. On Buonamici’s defense of Aristotelian poetics see Weinberg, I, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 34–35, and Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, pp. 425 ff., and *Marvels*, pp. 80 ff.

dled, the highly combustible humor is transformed from a coldly sluggish impediment to genial activity to its warmly dynamic facilitator; in this ignited form, he exulted, melancholy "causes great effects," among them rare powers of prophetic and poetic insight. For this reason, declared Buonamici, "poets are moved by frenzy and by the affection which is most efficacious in the melancholic." Nor is the poet alone in being moved by the passions induced by melancholy, Buonamici further pointed out, for the audience moved by his plaintive voice is similarly moved.¹⁵⁷ In short, Buonamici identified the theory of poetic melancholy derived from the pseudo-Aristotle of the *Problemata* with the theory of poetic catharsis to which the authentic Aristotle demonstrably subscribed.

Another late cinquecento poetic theorist to favor the Aristotelian over the Platonic genial theory, Lorenzo Giacomini (d. 1599), started out a 1587 Florentine oration on the subject by underscoring a fundamental point of agreement between them. The role of frenzy in fomenting creative activity, Giacomini informed his audience, had been recognized alike "by those wisest of all philosophers, Plato and Aristotle."¹⁵⁸ But where Plato and Aristotle drastically parted in this matter, Giacomini hastened to add, was in the very different ways in which they interpreted the meaning of frenzy, with Plato referring its cause to a place above nature, and Aristotle, to a place within nature. So far as a choice had to be made between these opposing theories of poetic creativity, Giacomini expressed a clear preference for Aristotle's naturalist over Plato's supernaturalist version.

A key analytical device employed by Giacomini in making this choice was the rule of simplicity, declaring that an immediate and uncomplicated explanation for a given phenomenon should take precedence over a more remote and complicated explanation. As Giacomini restated this specialized application of "Ockham's razor," also known to the logicians as the principle of parsimony or economy: "When we are able to render the causes of some effect which are near and immediate (*proprie, e vicine*), it is futile to resort to what is far off and occult (*è vano ricorrere e le lontane & occulte*) . . . , for it is

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Lorenzo Giacomini, *Del furor poetico discorso*, in *Orationi e discorsi* (Florence: Nelle case de Sermartelli, 1597), p. 54. See also Weinberg, *Trattati*, III, p. 424. On this discourse, delivered before the Accademia degli Alterati, see Weinberg, *History of Literary Criticism*, I, 322-4, and Palisca, *Musical Thought*, pp. 405-407.

in vain to have recourse to that which is less known in order to demonstrate what is better known."¹⁵⁹ And for Giacomini it was simpler to validate the role of a proximate natural melancholy in the poet's rush of creative activity, as Aristotle would have us believe, than the role of a distantly generated divine impulse of which Plato sought to persuade us.

Having thereby opted for the more immediate natural over the remoter supernatural explanation for poetic invention, Giacomini was faced with explaining how a cold humor well known for producing enervating, phlegmatic-like symptoms is also capable of producing the kind of highly charged behavior characteristic of poets. As was typical in this line of argumentation, his guide here was the *Problemata*, which he typically believed to be a genuine writing of Aristotle. "It is clear," replied Giacomini, "that the melancholy praised by Aristotle is not that more impure part of the humors, which is cold, dry, heavy, thick, and obscure, qualities which are contrary to the operation of the intellect, but melancholy which, through inflammation by the choleric humor, is hot, though still less hot than the choler, and is pure, subtle, and lucid, and for that reason accommodated to the act of the understanding." A comparison of melancholy with each of the other humors in their turn underscored for Giacomini the special fitness of the black bile for intellectual acuity, of which poetic acuity constitutes a special case. "It is adapted to this much more than phlegm," wrote Giacomini, "which is of great slowness of wit and frailty of memory; more than choler, which does not have firmness of endurance for persevering in studies; more than the sanguine humor, which distracts the mind, and inclines it to games and loves and pleasures in the objects of the senses."¹⁶⁰

This does not mean, however, Giacomini reasoned after pseudo-Aristotle, that the hotter among the aforementioned humoral complexions, sanguine and choler, are not able to play a part in the fomentation of melancholy acuity. In particular, as noted by his ancient master, "the melancholy complexion, when burned by choler, is most apt for the perfection of the acts of the mind," containing as it does "many hot and subtle parts similar to wine." And if the

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62 (Weinberg, p. 432). For the logical axiom to which this guiding precept of Giacomini's critical theory corresponds, known as "Ockham's razor," see above, pp. 9, 162.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60 (Weinberg, p. 430).

simile of wine, "which, by its nature, is fiery," underscored one key attribute of melancholy genius for Giacomini, enkindlement, it also underscored another, for, he pointed out, "water is also prominent within it, making it similar to vinegar which, after the more ardent spirits are dissolved, retains heat and tempered dryness."¹⁶¹

Lest, however, his appeal to logical simplicity be mistaken for atheism, Giacomini made sure that God was not left out of his picture altogether. After all, he pointed out to his audience, natural melancholy in its role as an instigator of poetic creativity still indirectly owed to a divine cause. In Giacomini's own words, the frenzied state induced in the poet by melancholy "will justifiably be called divine, since it proceeds from Nature, which is the daughter of God (*poiche procede da la Natura, che è figliuola di Dio*)." What he was not willing to grant was that the naturally induced form of melancholic frenzy was the same as that claimed by the Platonists to be divinely inspired. "If by 'frenzy' we mean that fixation of the soul on the idea, and if we denote that internal incitement and movement, born not of individual reasoning and judgment but of the natural disposition of the instrument to which it is united," Giacomini acknowledged, "then there will be frenzy in the poet." On the other hand, he cautioned, "if by 'divine frenzy' we should have understood a particular inspiration of God, Who immediately, as it were, has pushed us with His hand and has inflamed the mind toward poetry, this we believe to be a most vain fiction, contrary to reason and unworthy of the philosophic mind of the true lover."¹⁶² In this way Giacomini did not set out so much to repudiate the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy as to redefine it in Aristotelian naturalist terms.

Giacomini's reductionist approach to the doctrine of poetic frenzy also took into account the penchant by various of the Platonists to extend it to poetry's sister-disciplines. "If one concedes the divine frenzy to poetry," he asked, "why not also concede it to the other arts?" Why, for instance, should it not also be granted to the art of rhetoric, which, "by the testimony of Aristotle and by experience," is widely observed to have been imparted to many who, "widely observed to display a certain natural promptness in knowing, in accusing, in defending, and in persuading," have received no formal

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59 (Weinberg, p. 428).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2 (Weinberg, p. 432).

training in its precepts? After all, he asked facetiously, is it not “the property of the orator to move the affections and to fly into a passion as is the case with poetry?” By the same token, is not the divine frenzy equally applicable to the art of histrionics, by means of which a person, “with face, voice, and gesture, must transform himself into differing personalities existing outside of his own set disposition?” Following the same reasoning, is it not also ascribable to the many other arts calling for dynamic results, such as painting, music, and the military profession, all of which, as patently as poetry, “require a certain impetus and fervor?”¹⁶³ However, in broadening his scope from poetry to the arts in general, Giacomini, far from yielding ground to those Platonists who discovered a point of union for the arts in the divine frenzy, sapped the foundations of the Platonic genial theory by denying any part of direct supernatural frenzy in the creative act.

Similarly pitting Aristotle’s nature-based theory of poetic genius against Plato’s frenzy theory, in his case preferring a written dialogue over a spoken oration to express it, was Girolamo Frachetta (d. 1620). Thus, in his *Dialogo del furore poetico* Frachetta acknowledged through his spokesman that “I have always been of the opinion, am still so, and believe that I always will be so, that the judgment of Aristotle on the matter of the poetic frenzies, according to our firm and true belief, is to be held and maintained as true, not that of Plato.”¹⁶⁴ Agreeing with Castelvetro’s claim that Plato was only joking when he articulated his theory of divine frenzy, Frachetta expressed amazement that it was taken seriously by many of Plato’s followers. To his credit, Frachetta was glad to say, “the great Aristotle” was not among these, understanding as he did that exceptional poetic facility occurs “not by divine frenzy, but by genius and by the knowledge of the poet.”¹⁶⁵

While accepting, with Aristotle, that certain outside forces can have significant influence on the formation of poetic genius, Frachetta vehemently rejected the proposition that any of these forces exceed the bounds of nature. More particularly, with the *Problemata* his authority, he beheld in a form of heated natural melancholy the

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 62 (Weinberg, p. 433).

¹⁶⁴ Girolamo Frachetta, *Dialogo del furore poetico . . .* (Padua: Per Lorenzo Pasquati, 1581), p. 113. On this tract see also Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, I, 311–12.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

better explanation of poetic genius than the Platonic alternative of divinely inspired frenzy. "The melancholy humor, which rules over poets," his spokesman exclaims in support of this presumption, "has such great force, and indeed so frequently changes and alters, that sometimes its victim will be completely debilitated, cold and enervated, and other times will be powerful, full of vigor, and enkindled."¹⁶⁶ Like Pomponazzi earlier in his presentation of a similar argument, however, Frachetta did not take the exclusion of divine frenzy from his genial theory to mean the exclusion of all invisible influences from the celestial regions. For he unhesitatingly seconded the supposition that occult planetary forces can exercise influence over poets, above all that emitting from the "star of Saturn" (*stella di Saturno*) which he deemed, in collaboration with the black humor over which it rules, to claim a dual power of inducing the best as well as the worst in human behavior.¹⁶⁷

Another late Renaissance Aristotelian to underscore the underlying incompatibility between the poetic theories of his master and Plato, this time appearing in the pages of a commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, was Paolo Beni (1552–1625). Calling to mind Plato's notion of poet as a kind of versifying prophet, Beni freely admitted to a certain affiliation between the two genial functions, the motive being, however, not to raise poetic genius to the level of divinely inspired frenzy, but rather to reduce poetry and prophecy alike to a level of naturally stimulated genius. Like Frachetta, Beni agreed with Castelvetro's contention that Plato was only speaking "ironically" (*ironicè*) when he put the doctrine of divine frenzy in the mouth of Socrates.¹⁶⁸ For Beni, however, distinguishing his anti-Platonic critique from Castelvetro's, the *Poetics* did not stand alone as a guide to Aristotle's poetic theory. It was ably assisted by a work that he, like so many others of his day, mistakenly believed to be a genuine product of Aristotle's hand, the *Problemata*. Whereas Castelvetro, with Horace to corroborate his view, countered the Platonic notion of poetic frenzy with one of rationally devised linguistic artifices, Beni met the Platonic theory on its own ground by acknowledging that

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁶⁸ Paolo Beni, *In Aristotelis poeticam commentarii* (Venice: Apud Jo. Guerilium, 1624), part. 88, pp. 355–56. On Beni's decisive break with the Platonic genial theory see Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, pp. 428 ff. For Castelvetro's corresponding rebuke of Plato's frenzy theory see above, p. 237.

poetizing involved a kind of alienation resembling inebriation. Whereas the Platonists, however, maintained that this drunken-like state, which the Platonists likened to mystical ecstasy and prophetic illumination, originates in Heaven, Beni contrarily maintained that it owes “to melancholy, which naturally befalls poets from a temperament.”¹⁶⁹

This is not to say, however, that melancholy alone explained the powers of poetic genius for Beni. The black bile, he allowed, constitutes but one of several requisites of exceptional poetic ability, the others consisting of good birth, ardent study, and practiced skill. Whereas the Platonists viewed the poet as a passive receptacle of the divine frenzies, Beni rather insisted that genius, while invigorated by the heat of melancholy, must also be laboriously worked at. “We do not read that Virgil and many others have been stirred up by afflatus,” as he underscored this added exigency of genius; “rather they have produced their very illustrious poems by means of much sweat and study.” It is not supernatural inspiration which produced a great poet like Virgil, Beni exhorted, but a combination of natural disposition and learned skill. “Whether we speak of the orator or of the poet,” he declared, “there is required both nature and art, or, alternatively put, genius (*ingenium*) and study.”¹⁷⁰ And the requisite of “nature” meant for Beni, following what he believed to be Aristotle’s lead, a conjunction between practiced dexterity, inborn talent, and a moderately heated melancholy humor. The combined effects of these genial attributes, Beni determined, are a sufficient explanation of rare poetic aptitude without the need to make further reference to an impulse originating outside the poet’s natural capabilities. As for the last-named of these requisites of poetic genius, Beni conceived of melancholic frenzy, not as a natural correlate of divine frenzy, but rather as an alternative explanation of genius better answering its mysterious powers. Aristotle, declared Beni in summarizing the basic disparity between the two genial versions, “since he was of the opinion that frenzy in men of genius takes the form of melancholy, and thus can be referred to a natural cause, by the same token resolved that poetry, from its very beginning, was born from nature (*natura poësim fecerat a principio*).”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

In the foregoing Aristotelian rebuttals to the Platonic frenzy theory there has been no direct reply to one of the more trenchant anti-Peripatetics of the period, Patrizi. Serving to fill this void was the Paduan critic Faustino Summo (d. 1611), who sharply took Patrizi to task in his *Discorsi poetici* (1600). Unlike Frachetta and Beni in making the same case, however, who had exempted Plato himself from his rebuke by seconding Castelvetro's claim that he did not intend his doctrine of divine frenzy to be taken seriously, Summo expressed his opinion that Plato "truly believed it to be the case that such a gift must have been given by God to the poets, and that without it their endeavor to poetize was in vain."¹⁷²

Inasmuch as Patrizi's case for divine inspiration in poetry hinged from its purported affiliation with prophecy, we are not taken aback to learn that Summo's counterattack on Patrizi hinged from the same affiliation. As Aristotle observed in his treatise on divination, noted Summo, "the melancholic is like a spear-thrower from afar, and conjectures very accurately because the melancholy which resides within him does not remain cold as in its natural state, but rather becomes inflamed and burns."¹⁷³ In this perceptive writing as in the corresponding section of the *Problemata*, entreated Summo, Aristotle convincingly demonstrated "that the opinion of those men is false who have believed that the hitting of the mark has come from God; instead, he therein has proved that this is accomplished solely by the melancholy humor."¹⁷⁴ The central point of conflict in both cases, prophetic and poetic, was located by Summo in Patrizi's expostulation in the *Della poetica* "against the opinion of Aristotle concerning the virtue of melancholy." The strategy adopted by Summo in reply was to revisit Patrizi's various *dubbi*—this time around, however, to the advantage of Aristotle. For if Patrizi "had considered all that Aristotle has written in the *Problemata*," declared Summo, he would have discovered therein "the solution to his doubts."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Faustino Summo, *Discorsi poetici*. . . (Padua: appresso Francesco Bolzetta, 1600), disc. VIII, fol. 57^v. For Summo's Peripatetically driven attack on Platonic poetic theory see Weinberg, *Literary Criticism*, II, 710, and Hathaway, *Age of Criticism*, pp. 424–25, and p. 428: "Although each in his own way was unique, Summo, Buonamici, and Paolo Beni were representative of the period in the history of Italian literary criticism in which Aristotle's ideas tended to crowd out the Platonic and Neoplatonic idea myths."

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, fol. 60^r.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 58^r.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 59^{r v}.

One such *dubbio* of Patrizi faced up to by Summo pertains to whether the *Problemata* was even genuinely authored by Aristotle. Though admittedly lacking the philological tools to prove the authenticity of the text beyond question, Summo replied that considerable corroborative evidence could be amassed to support its likelihood, including, he stressed, the doctrine of melancholy genius as therein espoused. While failing to detect exact correspondences to the melancholy doctrine in Aristotle's authenticated writings, Summo did find many passages within their pages agreeing with the naturalist underpinning of the *Problemata*. Accordingly, in response to the question: "What, then, does Aristotle believe concerning frenzy?"¹⁷⁶ Summo offered references to a number of Aristotelian tracts which, if not explicitly naming melancholy as a causative agent, nevertheless confirmed a concept of natural exhilaration on which a doctrine of melancholy genius rested.

Among such examples, Summo reminded Patrizi, was Aristotle's mention in his *Rhetorica* of a hidden force, "called *Entes*, that is, divine," which is able to be transmitted from the poet-mystic to his auditors in such a manner that they "become enthusiasts (*enthusiastici*) either through praises, or through scoldings, or through anger, or through love." Another example serving Summo to the same effect was the *Nichomachean Ethics*, which, "speaking of good fortune and of a man who is fortunate, demonstrates that the fortunate man works in the same manner as the enthusiasts, who are exhausted by doing something without any reason." Another corroborative example offered up by Summo was the *Eudemian Ethics*, "which holds the happy life to be contained either in nature, or in discipline, or in practice, or in fortune, or in none of these ways but in the inspiration of some god." And still another was the *Politics*, which "divides the melodies into three, that is, into those that are moral, those that are pathetic, and those that are enthusiastic." Last, but far from least, comes the *Problemata* itself, in which Aristotle "makes mention of that frenzy from which issue ecstatical, maniacal, and enthusiastic men."¹⁷⁷ While conceding that, in the previously cited works, Aristotle might have neglected to specify melancholy as a cause of genial enthusiasm, Summo was persuaded that he had filled in the missing link with

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 57^v.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the *Problemata* by ascribing genius in all its forms, poetic genius included, to the effects of a naturally enkindled melancholy humor.

Having thus reaffirmed a widely shared Peripatetic belief of his time upholding Aristotle's personal authorship of the *Problemata* (an inference, as we now know, to be mistaken), Summo went on to confront a further *dubbio* of Patrizi as to how, as contended in that tract, an intrinsically cold and immobile humor is able to incite the kind of dynamic mental activity characteristic of an inspired poet? It is perfectly true, granted Summo, that the art of poetry, as any other genial skill, is in need of a high degree of motivating effervescence missing in the initially frigid state of the black bile. Acknowledging that "the melancholy humor, in the opinion of the physicians and of Aristotle himself, corresponds to the earth, and consequently of itself is cold and dry, and slow and full of darkness," Summo further insisted, with the aid of these same authorities, that "at the same time it is ready for transformation (*atto a mutarsi*), and for becoming, to greater or lesser degree, fervid."¹⁷⁸ In short, what distinguished cold melancholy in Summo's mind from, say, cold phlegm, thereby making it, as phlegm is not, adaptable to poetic genius, is its inherently combustible nature.

The poetic powers stirred up by melancholy, Summo further attested in his polemic, are only part of a larger spectrum of genial abilities provoked by measured inflammations of the black bile. Invoking the analogy of inebriation utilized in the *Problemata* to illustrate this point, Summo observed that, "as the drunkard behaves through wine, so does the melancholic behave through nature; just as there is a great variety of inebriants, so is there a great variety of melancholics."¹⁷⁹ Those in whom such inflamed melancholy dominates, Summo expatiated, "are inclined to abstraction, ingenious, wrathful, amorous, full of diverse desires, and loquaciously verbose," the reason being that the required heat "has been placed near the seat of the mind, as is necessary in the sibyls and bacchantes, and in all of those who are believed to be incited by a divine spirit"—this on the crucial proviso, of course, "that such an effect depends, not on illness, but on a natural intemperance." Aristotle correctly applied this assessment of melancholy genius not only to impassioned mystics and

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, fols. 59^r, 60^v.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, fols. 59^v–60^r.

prophets, declared Summo, but also to an impassioned poet like Maracus the Syracusan, "who was all the better poet when he was out of his mind."¹⁸⁰

While the foregoing arguments were overtly directed to Patrizi, a closer reading reveals that they were equally addressed to the brand of Ficinian Platonism which Patrizi likewise was attempting to combat. For Summo, putting him in marked opposition to Ficino as well as to Patrizi, the wholly natural attributes of melancholy were sufficient to explain poetic genius independently of supernatural frenzy. Freely granting that "the cold humor, so long as it is cold, does not suffice to make men amorous, wrathful, and concupiscible, all of which are hot effects," Summo called on the physicians and Aristotle, not as allies of Plato but as his critics, to confirm that melancholy, when heated to the proper degree, "is able of itself (*per se stesso*) to cause mobility in men."¹⁸¹

Accordingly, Summo maintained, Aristotle invoked the example of the frenzied Syracusan poet Maracus out of a belief, not that he had been incited by a divine impulse, but that he had been incited by a marvel-working natural humor merely appearing to be divinely agitated. "And though Aristotle made mention of this frenzy, and called it the same name which Plato had already given it," Summo explained, "it should not thereby be thought that he agrees with his predecessor concerning the efficient cause. On the contrary there is much is much difference between them." As Summo understood the terms of this disagreement, Plato saw poetic frenzy as born "from an external cause (*da causa estrinica*), whether it be God, or the Muses, or other divine influences," whereas Aristotle alternatively saw poetic frenzy as born from "an internal cause (*da cagione interna*), completely natural, which is melancholy."¹⁸² As to which of these explanations better met the criteria for poetic genius, Summo unhesitatingly opted for the latter as spelled out in the *Problemata*. "It appears, therefore, from the argument carried out in that place by Aristotle," as Summo interpreted the supposed author of that tract to say, "that the poetic frenzy in men comes only from melancholy, and that the attribu-

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 58^v.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 60^r.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, fol. 58^r. In the same connection, however, Summo fell into agreement with Patrizi in discounting a third explanation for frenzy, that of a subterranean exhalation upheld most famously by Plutarch.

tion to it of an external divinity was not his own opinion, but that of others."¹⁸³

With the specter of Pomponazzi's suspect reputation to warn him, one who had similarly reduced human genius to a natural phenomenon, Summo was aware that he, too, was laying himself open to the accusation of atheism. To obviate that charge, he concluded his tract with the same fideist escape clause employed by Pomponazzi when caught on the horns of the identical dilemma. From this fideist perspective Summo queried at last, after having considered their respective positions on the matter at hand, "how those two great men of genius, Plato and Aristotle, can be understood with the benefit of their merely natural light (*col lor lume naturale*)?" Granting that "one approaches nearer to the mark than the other"—that is to say, Aristotle stands closer to the truth than Plato—Summo nonetheless felt compelled in the final analysis, in keeping with the dictates of his Christian faith, to confess that "both, nonetheless, remain far behind, nor do they perceive or are able to perceive, that which we comprehend with a light truly holy and divine which, similarly expressed as frenzy, is a wholly unmediated gift of God and of His Holy Spirit, which he grants to him who freely and liberally pleases Him in an ineffable and singular manner."¹⁸⁴ Notwithstanding a nominally fideist deliverance of Summo from the philosophical quandary posed by his quarrel with Patrizi, resembling that of Pomponazzi earlier in the century but now with its stakes raised by an unprecedented intolerance toward heterodox answers to traditional religious questions, the overwhelming weight of his impact on posterity lay, not with what appears to be a tacked-on affirmation of faith over reason, but with his philosophically forged theory of melancholy genius in poets radically free of supernatural intervention.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, fol. 59^r.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 60^r v.

¹⁸⁵ According to Hathaway on the basis of the above statement, *Age of Criticism*, p. 424, Summo "rejected both Plato and Aristotle as non-Christian philosophers incapable of understanding the true concept of Christian graces." If this can be said for Summo, however, it can equally be said for Pomponazzi. In both cases the appeal to Christian faith was prompted by a resolve to evade the charge of atheism while still holding to a rigorously naturalist version of poetic genius based on the Aristotelian philosophy.

* * *

From their opposing philosophical poles, then, Patrizi and Summo, with the subject of poetic genius their combative arena, effectively completed a dissolutive process of philosophy which was also inchoately present in a late Renaissance nature philosopher like Cardano. The result was not, as envisaged by Ficino, the marriage of Platonic supernaturalism with Aristotelian naturalism, but their utter and permanent divorce. In withstanding the kind of radical naturalist tendencies indicated in Pomponazzi and Summo, as it will now be our objective to show, Patrizi was not the last of the Renaissance nature philosophers to offer a Platonic-based alternative to the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius. He was to find a worthy successor in a Neapolitan Dominican serving to bridge Renaissance with seventeenth century genial theory, Tommaso Campanella.

Understandably, as we will now see, Campanella counted Patrizi, together with a not-so-easily accommodated Telesio, as a formative influence on his way of thinking. Campanella's aim, shared by Ficino as by Patrizi before him, was nothing less than to endow philosophy and poetry with the same claim to certainty as is vested in mystical ecstasy and its close affiliate, prophetic illumination. Also anticipated by Patrizi, Campanella allowed entrance into his renovated system of an Hermetically conditioned doctrine of natural magic on the proviso that it be supernaturally charged in accordance with a Platonic philosophy of transcendence. For Campanella as for Patrizi, a cutting edge of this polarizing shift in philosophy consisted of the query into the origin of genius. More specifically, what brought Campanella into coalition with Patrizi and into collision with Ficino was his belief that a finitely natural humor like melancholy is intrinsically incapacitated to participate in that infinitely sublime philosophical and poetic quest.

E. *Campanella's Coup de Grâce*

Responding to what he saw as a regrettable materialist shift in philosophy during his time, Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), in the preface to his *Metaphysica* (1638), indignantly took to task those he deemed to be responsible. It was not, however, as we would expect from his choice of language, the Epicureans of his day who bore

the main brunt of Campanella's attack on materialism, but the Aristotelians, whom he accused of reducing to natural causes events so astonishing that they are explainable only through causes transcending nature. By reason of this philosophical inadequacy, Campanella charged, the Aristotelians, in underlying collaboration with the Epicurean predilection to interpret such prodigious events as issuing "from the mere chance encounter of the elements," failed not only to explain properly such naturally instigated marvels as the magnet, the sting of the scorpion, and the bite of the rabid dog, but also such supernaturally induced marvels as "the origin of souls, . . . of prophecy, and of miracles."¹⁸⁶

In caustic retort to what he viewed as a joint Aristotelian-Epicurean debasement of the philosophical profession, Campanella set forth as a foremost justification driving his composition of the *Metaphysica* the reminder that "if the sensible elements and their sensible powers, that is, heat, cold, moisture, and dryness, should have sufficed for rendering the cause of all things which occur in nature, in art, and in the human city, there would not be necessary the pursuit of other metaphysical principles." To place philosophy on a new, more secure footing, therefore, in place of the insecure sense-based footing previously put into place by the Aristotelians, Campanella proclaimed a need for "a science existing above physical nature (*scientia supra physicam*)."¹⁸⁷ Contrasting it with the Peripatetic competitor currently in institutional favor, Campanella declared, his *metaphysica nova* looked for a philosophical unravelment of life's mysteries—including, to the central point of the present study, the mystery of human

¹⁸⁶ Tommaso Campanella, *Universalis philosophiae seu metaphysicarum rerum iuxta propria dogmata*. . . [= *Metaphysica*, Vol. IV of *Opera omnia*] (Paris: Apud P. Burelly, 1638, ristampa fototipica a cura di Luigi Firpo, Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1961), proem., p. 4. Hereafter, cited as *Metaphysica*. For modern Italian trans., with parallel texts, see *Metafisica*, ed., trans. Giovanni di Napoli, 3 vols.; *Filosofi Moderni*, vols. 10–12 (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1967), I, 88–90. For recent studies of Campanella see Nicola Badaloni, *Tommaso Campanella* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1965); Bernardino M. Bonansea, *Tommaso Campanella: Renaissance Pioneer of Modern Thought* (Wash., D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1969); and John M. Headley, *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997). For summaries of Campanella's thought see Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 215–20; Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 211–19; and Schmitt and Skinner, *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 257–61.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* On Campanella's anti-Peripatetic sentiments see Headley, *Campanella*, ch. 4, pp. 145 ff., and on his more targeted rejection of the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius, Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 45 ff.

genius, not in the erring book of Aristotle but in the unerring books of nature (*codex naturae*) and of sacred scripture (*codex Dei*). What Campanella does not here admit, but extensively demonstrates all the same throughout his writings, is that his joint reading of nature and sacred scripture was broadly filtered through another ancient philosopher acting as a corrective to Aristotelian errancies, to wit, Aristotle's teacher Plato. More specifically concerning the central topic of this study: the philosophical corrective that Campanella applied to pseudo-Aristotle's doctrine of melancholy genius was not really new, but the very old one that Plato termed the divine frenzies.

Campanella's repudiation of the Aristotelian genial theory was part and parcel, then, of a larger repudiation of Aristotle's metaphysical and epistemological principles. By excessively relying on the fallible categories of Aristotle, Campanella charged, "many men, I have discovered, stray from the truth, and thus falsely transcribe their books from the book of God."¹⁸⁸ From the standpoint of his Christian faith Campanella was persuaded that God "reveals to his servants things which are hidden, whether natural or supernatural (*occulta, sive physica, sive supernaturalia*), things which sense does not know, unless partially and weakly, concerning their causes, their signs, and their effects." In contradistinction to merely philosophical conjectures dependent on the senses, when God "discloses His arcana through a revelation which we have received from Him, whether it touches the external senses, the interior spirit, or the mind," Campanella attested, "the resultant wisdom is not conjectural but testimonial (*non est opinativa, sed testificativa*), and is entirely worthy of faith." Its certainty, he maintained, derives from being acquired, "not from a reading of the divine book, the contents of which we are ignorant because we err in accurately deciphering it, but from a divine oracle (*ex divino oraculo*), whether directly revealed or indirectly rendered through the mediation of angels." In seeking entry into the mysteries of existence, Campanella averred, "he who has been sent by philosophers employs the characters (*notas*) of philosophy, whereas he who has been sent by God employs divine characters."¹⁸⁹

Campanella's plan to establish metaphysical philosophy on a new foundation bears obvious comparison with the plan of his older con-

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3 (Di Napoli, I, 82-83).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* (Di Napoli, I, 84-87).

temporary Francis Bacon (1561–1626) to do the same for logic. The crucial difference between the two renovative plans, of course, is that Bacon's revolutionary logic, involving a shift from deductive to inductive method, was intended to better accord with the novel discoveries of contemporary science, whereas Campanella's revolutionary—in truth, counterrevolutionary—metaphysic was intended to better accord with the officially ordained dictates of his Christian faith. The Dominican friar's incentive for carrying out this ambitious project, a need to rectify the many inadequacies of the Peripatetic philosophy, is extensively spelled out in the preface to the *Metaphysica*.

Campanella was forthright about what he considered to be the lamentable harvest of this misconceived Peripatetic legacy, for from its precepts, he lamented, “has arisen Machiavellianism, the ruin of human kind (*et hinc ortus est machiavellismus, perniciēs generis humani*).”¹⁹⁰ In voicing this complaint, it is clear from other references in his writings, Campanella viewed the school of *Machiavellistae* as embracing more than the political disciples of Machiavelli. It also, as he saw it, embraced the philosophical disciples of Pomponazzi, who, he charged in his *De homine*, was as responsible as Machiavelli in reducing religion to “an invention contrived to terrify the populace and to subjugate them to the laws.” To remedy this defect of the Peripatetic outlook Campanella promised, with regard to “miracles and prophecy,” to demonstrate a method “for distinguishing natural and imagined forms (*ficta*) from the supernatural and true ones.”¹⁹¹

Campanella's larger motive in confronting the Aristotelians consisted of more than a desire to withstand the forces of materialistic atheism. It also consisted of a desire to withstand the forces of the

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5 (Di Napoli, pp. 94–95). On Bacon's “new logic” see Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 226–29. For Campanella's anti-Machiavellian sentiments see Skinner, “Political Philosophy,” in Schmitt et al., ed., *Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 444. However, Headley, *Campanella*, ch. 5, pp. 180 ff., while recognizing an overt antipathy of Campanella for Machiavelli, also reluctantly concedes pertaining to a commonplace portrayal of his subject as a “Second Machiavel,” p. 190: “If to be Machiavellian means to be capable of resorting occasionally to the amoral, cunning act for the purposes of maintaining political community, then Campanella is a Machiavellian.” For Headley the critical divide between Machiavelli and Campanella rests, not on the means of statecraft, but on its ultimate end, with their contrasting positions determined by an ideological split between one vision of statecraft radically liberated from religious imperatives and another vision of statecraft aimed at effecting a theocratically conditioned universal monarchy governed by the papacy.

¹⁹¹ Campanella, *De homine*, ed. Romano Amerio (Rome: Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, 1960), no. 4, p. 44. This tract was previously unpublished.

Lutheran and Calvinist heresies. It is not by chance, Campanella determined, that the atheistic pronouncements of Machiavelli and Pomponazzi appeared nearly simultaneously with the heretical pronouncements of Martin Luther. For, as he saw it, they were jointly inspired by the Devil, whose strategy it is to lead human beings to perdition along diverse paths, one consisting of religious heresy and the other of philosophical materialism and "Epicureanism."¹⁹²

Aristotle and Epicurus, according to Campanella, were not alone among the ancients to succumb to the naturalist fallacy. Joining them in its promulgation, he charged in his *Atheismus triumphatus*, was the Greek physician Galen "to whom the soul seemed mortal."¹⁹³ From his limited physiological perspective, contended Campanella, Galen failed properly to comprehend that, just as true metaphysical philosophy characterizes nature by reference to both the inner relationship between all its individual parts and to causes lying outside itself, so should every particular human science, medicine included, claiming derivation from its principles. Likewise violating this holistic principle of medicine, Campanella charged, were many of Galen's followers, a typical representative of which, "once he has clarified the parts of the body and the soul, declares himself to be satisfied, not feeling compelled to go the further step of considering the beginning and the end."¹⁹⁴ Viewed from a larger metaphysical vantage point, noted Campanella, the physician is no more justified in stopping with a purely material reading of a disease than the Epicurean philosopher is justified in stopping with a material reading of cosmic reality. In brief, Campanella's criticism of the Peripatetic philosophy also extended to a criticism of the kind of operational skepticism he saw as arising out of the limited procedures of contemporary medical practices.

Not put to the same disadvantage as Aristotle for Campanella's philosophical purposes, however, was Plato, whose supernaturalist

¹⁹² See, e.g., *Metaphysica*, pref., p. 2 (Di Napoli, pp. 78–79). According to Di Napoli's intro. to this work, p. 53: "Tre erano quindi gli obiettivi della lotta del Campanella: Lutero, Machiavelli, Aristotele; la radice dei mali, però, era sempre Aristotele, giacché, a giudizio dello Stilese, sia Lutero che Machiavelli trovavano nell' aristotelismo il loro *humus*: . . . l'aristotelismo, poi, è visto e combattuto, in sede teoretica, negli averroisti e negli alessandristi, e particolarmente in P. Pomponazzi, in tutte le sue tesi."

¹⁹³ Campanella, *Atheismus triumphatus, seu reductio ad religionem per scientiarum veritates* (Rome: Apud haeredem Bartholomaei Zannetti, 1631), cap. 7, p. 42.

¹⁹⁴ *Metaphysica*, pref., p. 4 (Di Napoli, pp. 90–91).

precepts better fitted the demands of his renovated metaphysical and epistemological systems. Pitted against the inferior Aristotelian “knowledge and understanding” by Campanella was a superior knowledge and understanding “taught not only by the schools of the Hebrews and the Christians, and by all the law givers, but also by Pythagoras, by Socrates, and by Plato.”¹⁹⁵ It is not by chance, accordingly, he noted in his *Atheismus triumphatus*, that “impious Aristotle” in addition to reducing revelatory to nature-based knowledge, rejected a belief in an eternal afterlife and “held Paradise and Hell to be fables in contradiction to the pious philosophy of Socrates and Plato.”¹⁹⁶

The Plato that Campanella most closely identified with, then, was not Ficino’s Aristotelianized version, but one emancipated from Peripatetic entanglement along the same lines as those of Patrizi. Whereas Ficino’s epistemology represented largely a continuation of the Thomistic synthesis of faith and reason, with their main difference lying in a shift from Aristotle to Plato as its principal organizing authority, Campanella’s epistemology had more in common with late medieval efforts to undercut the union of reason and faith like those of Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Nicholas Cusanus. To this end Campanella could appeal not only to a tradition of Platonism now cut free of its Aristotelian millstone, but also to a tradition of skeptical fideism of the kind earlier represented by the Aristotelian-detesting Gianfrancesco Pico, whose *Examen vanitatis* anticipated Campanella’s own *De gentilismo non retinendo* (1636).¹⁹⁷ If there is anything “new” in all of this, it is the addition to his philosophical mix of insights furnished him by a thinker of even more recent vintage than Ficino, Telesio.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* (Di Napoli, I, 86–87).

¹⁹⁶ *Atheismus triumphatus*, cap. 7, p. 42.

¹⁹⁷ According to Walker, *Magic*, p. 203, “Ficino’s ideas and purposes are powerfully refracted by Campanella’s extraordinary personality and mental outlook.” But this “refraction” on Campanella’s part, as here indicated, even more acutely reflects a subsequent philosophical trend away from Ficino’s amalgamation of Plato and Aristotle to one of philosophical polarity between them. Cf. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, p. 179: “This book, although written a century after the *Examen vanitatis*, is perhaps its closest intellectual heir. Campanella’s polemic against Aristotle has the same tone as Pico’s.” On the resemblance between the anti-Aristotelian critiques of Campanella and Gianfrancesco Pico, but also pointing up the differing motives behind them—one distrusting philosophy altogether and the other endeavoring to place philosophy on new foundations, see Headley, “Tommaso Campanella and Jean de Launoy: The Controversy over Aristotle and his Reception in the West,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43 (1990), 529–50, esp. at p. 532.

Paradoxically, in revising his epistemology to coincide with a refurbished metaphysic, Campanella appears to have rejected the Aristotelian and Epicurean versions of sensationalism only to fall subject to Telesio's version of the same. As Campanella paraphrased a principle of knowledge in the introduction to his *Metaphysica* that, as first sight, appears to contradict his anti-Peripatetic principles: "We never declare things as true which have not first been validated by the senses." Campanella's exegesis of this longstanding empiricist axiom, however, discloses its closer proximity to Platonic than to either Aristotelian or Epicurean epistemological theory. Even when acceding reliability to the senses according to his Telesian model, Campanella also let it be known that some senses are more reliable than others. "Not every sense," he cautioned with this proviso in mind, "is certain of a thing which it reads in the book of God."¹⁹⁸ On the contrary, as Campanella reformulated Telesian epistemology to meet the requirements of his revamped metaphysic, some finer senses are attuned to a realm existing beyond nature whereas other cruder senses are deeply immersed in nature. In this way Campanella so internalized the meaning of sense knowledge espoused by Telesio as to make it virtually indistinguishable from illuminist supersensual knowledge of the type upheld by Patrizi.

"My mind," Campanella declared in keeping with his Platonized reworking of the Telesian philosophy, "is stimulated by God through illumination and motion" (*mens mea a Deo impellitur illuminatione et motione*).¹⁹⁹ Obfuscating the clarity of vision implicit in this notion, Campanella called to mind, are not only differences of subtlety in the senses themselves, but also various external obstructions. When a man is ill, for example, or suffers some physiological impediment such as a taste of bitterness in the mouth or an infection in an eye, we can predict that he will have a more obfuscated glance into God's

¹⁹⁸ *Metaphysica*, proem., p. 2 (Di Napoli, pp. 80–81). For the Telesian input into this view see Di Napoli's intro., p. 4. and Garin, *Italian Humanism*, pp. 215 ff. Telesio, according to Grendler, *Critics*, p. 197, brought Persio into friendship with a young Campanella. But concerning the refusal by Patrizi, at Persio's request, to look as sympathetically on Telesian principles, see above, pp. 375–76n.

¹⁹⁹ *Metaphysica*, proem., p. 4 (Di Napoli, pp. 90–1). As Garin, *Italian Humanism*, p. 216, has noted, Campanella "joined sensuous knowledge and intelligible intuition into a single concept." Cf. Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, pp. 211 ff., maintaining in the opening sentence of this section that "these two traditions of nature philosophy, the empiricism and sensationalism of Telesio and the Neoplatonism of Patrizi [sic], were merged in the thought of Tommaso Campanella."

book than one not so hampered. Also, as in the case of events which are past or are immediately beyond our observable scope, we sometimes depend on the knowledge of others who are in a better position to gain entry into nature's secrets.²⁰⁰ But a principal cause of obscurity for Campanella lay in the conventional methodology of the philosophical discipline itself, of which the most obvious offender was Aristotle. One who has properly cleansed his mind of such obscurational defects, Campanella testified, "discerns the truth, not through syllogism, but through an inner illumination (*per illuminationem interiolem*), just as, at the other extreme, inner darkness and impurity inclines a man to falsity without the need of a syllogism."²⁰¹

Campanella's detection of an underlying epistemological discrepancy between Platonic illuminist and Aristotelian empirical theory necessarily redounded on his concept of human genius, which displayed a corresponding contradiction between the Platonic theory of divine frenzy and the Aristotelian theory of melancholy genius. Here we will assess this contradiction at three conspicuous points of intersection in Campanella's writings. The first intersecting point consisted of a residual belief on Campanella's part in the existence and efficacy of demons; the second point, of a belief in the powers of unmediated mystical ecstasy and prophetic illumination; and the third point, of the power of poetic revelations to rival those of the mystics and prophets. Following Ficino, Campanella discerned in each of these genial modalities the psychic acme where the meeting of material temporality with supermaterial eternity achieve their supreme crystallization. Unlike Ficino, however, in keeping with the late medieval scholastic maxim that no commensuration exists between finite and infinite things, Campanella declared that there can be no proportion between divinely illuminated genius and the extraordinary natural achievements ascribed to a heated melancholy humor. In taking exception to Aristotle on this subject, moreover, Campanella let it be known that he did not consider that philosopher's modern followers to have misread the intentions of their ancient master. Whatever was repugnant in the pronouncements of contemporary Peripatetics, Campanella determined, could also be found in Aristotle's own writings.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3 (Di Napoli, I, 80-83).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4 (Di Napoli, I, 88-89).

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Having passed a good part of his mature life in the forced isolation of a prison cell, Campanella was able to verify by personal experience a principle taught him by the medical and philosophical traditions: not only do speculative minds like his own find solitude better suited to their high-flying cogitations than social involvement, but they also suffer more than more socially engaged minds in afflictions of melancholy. No more than Patrizi before him, however, who undoubtedly experienced comparable afflictions in his own solitary meditations, was Campanella willing to grant credibility to the popular theory attributed to Aristotle that melancholy is a desirable natural aid in the cultivation of human genius. Also in accord with Patrizi, Campanella saw not only extreme Peripatetic naturalists like Pomponazzi as standing in the way of his liberation of genius from its melancholic fetters, but also Aristotelianized Platonists like Ficino and Platonized Aristotelians like Nifo.

This is not to say that Campanella did not share certain premises with those whose genial theories he contested. He had no problem, for example, agreeing with Ficinian Platonists and Aristotelians alike, as pointed up in his *De sensu rerum et magia*, that, “when there is present a great quantity of hot black bile, those aroused are prompt of spirit in all their movements.” Putting Campanella at loggerheads with the Ficinians, however, was his tart rejection of the postulate, in this same context, that a divine spirit is working with melancholy behind the scenes. In making this argument Campanella appears to have marked out a position not substantially removed from that of the Peripatetic extremists, concurring with them that those suffering from adust melancholy “appear to be inspired by a divine afflatus (*quae divino inspiraculo afflari videntur*)” when their distraught condition is really a result of a mere “natural intemperance.”²⁰² At a more basic philosophical level, however, with the precedent of Patrizi to assist it, Campanella’s genial outlook also put him at loggerheads with the Peripatetics by distinguishing between the kinds of superficial marvelworking features inhering in melancholy and the genuine genial powers able to be acquired through divine inspiration.

²⁰² Campanella, *De sensu rerum et magia libri quatuor* (Frankfurt: Apud Egenolphum Emmelium, 1620), lib. III, cap. 11, p. 238.

“The mind (*mens*), which has descended from God,” Campanella proclaimed in his *De homine* with St. Bernard his authority, “at times so longs for divine things that it becomes, as it were, separated from the [material] spirit (*separatur a spiritu*) and, without phantasms and motions, comes to know divine things.” The divine efflux producing this result, he declared, “is able to seize both the spirit and body in ecstasy, elevate them into the heights, and, as witnessed in numerous holy men, assist them to peer directly into divinity.”²⁰³ Those adopting the opposing Peripatetic view in this matter in effect ascribed the elevated thoughts and miracle working of the Christian saints to a mere melancholy indisposition.

Nor can the case be convincingly made, Campanella charged, that Aristotle himself, with his gaze into nature rather than into the realm of ideas transcending nature, simply sidestepped the crucial role of divine illumination in his discussions about the human mind. On the contrary, he insisted in preface to his *Metaphysica*, it can be incontrovertibly established that Aristotle personally spurned a theory of divinely inspired genius, holding it to be nothing more elevated than “delirium and fable” caused by an excess of melancholy.²⁰⁴ Those so foolish as to follow Aristotle in this matter, among whom Campanella counted Pomponazzi as one of the more notorious exemplars, committed the unforgivable blasphemy of ascribing “the insanity of melancholy” to, among others illustrious for rare purity and clarity of mind, St. Brigid and St. Caterina.²⁰⁵ For this reason, Campanella averred, “Pomponazzi and Aristotle will not convincingly be able to attribute miracles to a temperament.”²⁰⁶

While revealing that Aristotle and his disciple Pomponazzi were uppermost in his mind when he launched his offensive against the doctrine of melancholy genius, it is evident that Campanella also considered Ficino to be deserving of reproach. At times, it is true, Campanella’s depiction of the part played by melancholy in the instigation of genius did not appear to be all that far removed from

²⁰³ *De homine*, no. 5, p. 56.

²⁰⁴ *Metaphysica*, proem., p. 5 (Di Napoli, pp. 94–95).

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pars III, lib. XVI, cap. 11, art. 1, p. 226 (Di Napoli, III, 306–307). Receiving special mention among these offenders by Campanella was a certain Battista da Monopoli (= Baptista Monopolitanus). According to Di Napoli, however, in a footnote pertaining to this reference, p. 306, the said Battista “non è bene individuabile; si trattava di uno dei tanti autori di scritti di magia.”

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, proem., p. 4 (Di Napoli, I, pp. 86–87).

Ficino's, conceding to melancholy, if not the exaggerated role maintained by his Florentine predecessor, at least a reduced role by helping to prepare amenable material conditions conducing to the realization of genial accomplishments. "By subduing the spirit" (*terrendo spiritum*), as Campanella explained this reluctant concession in his *Liber theologicorum* (completed 1624), melancholy "may draw it to the interior, where it is favorable to contemplation."²⁰⁷ All the same, Campanella cautioned in this regard, "melancholy is not, as the natural philosophers (*physici*) in the Peripatetic school ignorantly declare, the disposing or efficient cause either of prophecies or of the sciences." Should melancholy be found in the company of mystical ecstasy, Campanella counseled, their association should be judged to be accidental rather than essential, with melancholy "acting solely as a sign" (*signum est solummodo*) of much heat and tenuous spirit, which, when pure, is most apt for every science, but when impure fosters madness and alienation."²⁰⁸ By confounding a material effect for an efficient cause, Campanella complained, Ficino had inadvertently helped to prepare the way not only for the materialistic atheism of Pomponazzi and Machiavelli, but also for the heresies of Luther and Calvin, with the followers of the latter thereby emboldened in their claim that their demonically riddled melancholic phantasies were divinely instilled revelations of God.

In keeping with a longstanding demonological tradition, Campanella's denial of a divine presence in melancholy did not exclude a possible demonic one. Putting this supposition in its broadest terms, Campanella attested in his *Liber theologicorum* (completed 1624) that "the Devil employs natural causes for the effecting of his operations" (*utitur enim diabolus ad operationes suas naturalibus causis*).²⁰⁹ Applying the same principle to the marvelous operations assigned by popular consensus to witches and sorcerers, Campanella did not wonder that some had mistaken demonically goaded impulses for their opposite, inspiration through what Plato dubbed the divine frenzies. For it is

²⁰⁷ Campanella, *Magia e Grazia (Theologicorum: Liber XIV)*, ed. Romano Amerio (Rome: Istituto di Studi Filosofici, 1957), art. 2, p. 64. Original Latin and Italian trans. in parallel text.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64. On Campanella's demonology see Thorndike, *Magic*, VII, pp. 291 ff.; Walker, *Magic*, pp. 205 ff., and Yates, *Bruno*, ch. 20, pp. 360 ff.

a favored stratagem of the Devil, Campanella cautioned, to lure his human victims into eternal damnation by masking his evil genius as the good genius instilled by God.

Woven into the fabric of Campanella's "new metaphysic," then, was a very old premise of Christian theology declaring melancholy to be the Devil's bath. Because various things in the world externally resemble one another, Campanella cautioned in his *De sensu*, does not mean that they internally belong to the same order of causes, "and he who does not well distinguish between these is often deceived." Observing that his time was rife with melancholics pretending to a divine origin of their imagined visions when they were really demonically vexed, with he himself being personally acquainted with one such personage, Campanella saw this charade as having had a long history going back to ancient times. Among those listed by Campanella as having been prone to melancholic ravings were "Socrates, Callimachus, Scotus, Hercules, and Mohammed, who, out of their natural passion, were effected by mania in this manner." Helping to prop up the delusion, Campanella added, were the Python priestesses who, by virtue of their demonically instigated divinatory powers, "deceived Aristotle, Galen, Avicenna and others into believing that no other prophecy exists but a natural form."²¹⁰

The feminine gender of the Python priestesses was no more coincidental for Campanella than for the more zealous of the witch hunters, for they had their modern progeny, he pointed out in his *De sensu*, in the little old peasant women (*aniculae*) who were a main target of the church inquisitors.²¹¹ While allowing that these demonically vexed hags sometimes exhibited signs of melancholic fits in association with their sorcerous thoughts and deeds, Campanella also insisted that their condition should not be reduced to melancholy. In this way Campanella demonstrated that his renovated metaphysic had retained not only the principle of demonology which was a characteristic mark of Platonism through the centuries, but also the principle of misogyny which was a commonplace by-product of the demonological outlook.

The prominent direction taken by Campanella's demonology, however, was not one entreating the execution of those who, having

²¹⁰ *De sensu*, lib. III, cap. 11, p. 240.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

become debilitated by their melancholy, had allowed themselves to become seduced by Satanic deceit. Rather, it was one of addressing the underlying cause of their affliction as a means to its cure. And inasmuch as the disease has originated in a place beyond nature, Campanella emphasized in this regard, so must the cure to which it corresponds. Once it is established that a demon lies behind a given melancholic vexation, Campanella asserted, “the evil is not expelled without religion.” This is not to say, however, he also allowed, that corporeal medicine cannot be of some assistance in this endeavor, if only an auxiliary one in subordination to a higher spiritual medicine. But while granting that natural melancholy can often be detected in alienated cases like these, Campanella cautioned against carrying this observation to a *reductio ad absurdum*, turning a demonic symptom of melancholy into its cause. To do so, he warned, is to have the physician fall victim to the same demonic deception as the patient, since “it is evident from his frenzies, lies, fables, and frequent revelations, that the Demon has perpetually assisted this condition.”²¹²

It is not by chance that Campanella’s revalidation of demonology appeared in the course of a disquisition on prophecy. The centrality of the prophecy motif to Campanella’s philosophical reconstruction is indicated in the preface to his *Metaphysica*, where the author expressed outrage against Aristotle for attributing to a mere natural humor “the divine voices of the sibyls and the alienations of the prophets, of which we have numerous testimonies.”²¹³ What his further treatment of this subject in the pages of the *De sensu* informs us is that Campanella was concerned with more than what he considered to be the materialistic and atheistic implications of the Peripatetic rendition of prophecy. He was concerned with its demonological implications as well, his reasoning being that one of the more favored avenues of the demons into human affairs was through the voices of false prophets parading themselves as divinely inspired ones. While viewing melancholy as readily adaptable to the strategy of the demons in counterfeiting divinely inspired ecstasies and prophetic revelations, Campanella held it to be an utterly inappropriate natural adjunct to the genuine article.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Metaphysica*, proem., p. 5 (Di Napoli, I, 94–95). Emphasizing the prophetic element in Campanella’s “supernaturalist” critique of Aristotle is Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 45–51, esp. pp. 48–49.

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In the *Metaphysica* Campanella bitterly denounced those who, as he put it, "ridicule prophecy as though it were a foolish thing, a passion of melancholy, which predicts the future by chance."²¹⁴ Formally distinguishing four species of predictive power—divine, diabolical, natural, and artificial, Campanella determined that demonic and artificial prophecy are ultimately reducible to the natural form, since they ultimately owe the accuracy of their predictions to knowledge attained through natural means. Thus, at bottom, Campanella's essential distinction was not between four kinds of prediction, but between two kinds, natural and supernatural, with only the former ascribable to the melancholy humor.

Natural prophecy occurs, Campanella observed, when there is communicated to the prophet, through the mediation of the air, certain influences descending from the planetary spheres. While accepting that such natural prophets are often found to be afflicted by melancholy, Campanella insisted that this occurs, "not because melancholy induces divination, as Aristotle falsely believed (inasmuch as melancholy consists of nothing else but the dregs of the burned blood), but because their spirit (*spiritus*) is very tenuous and they are easily impressed." It followed from Campanella's view of natural prophecy, springing as it does from the contingencies of nature, that it is a no more reliable guide to the future than are the vicissitudinous natural processes out of which it arises. Divine prophecy, on the other hand, belonged in Campanella's mind to a realm existing beyond the vicissitudes of nature. "Those who prophesy by divine inspiration," avouched Campanella, "are joined by an elevation of the mind to God, Who, since he is the Author of absent and future things, exhibits to them those things which are absent and in the future for the benefit of their seeing powers and of those things by which He is revealed through them."²¹⁵

The critical distinction made by Campanella in the *Metaphysica* between supernaturally and naturally induced prediction is recapitulated in the *De sensu*, where it is stated that divine prophecy "is not initiated in corporeal spirit, as in the case of natural prophecies in melancholics and brute beasts, but in the mind itself, transmitted to men by [God]." In this way, Campanella maintained, God informs

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pars III, lib. XVI, cap. 11, art. 1, p. 226 (Di Napoli, III, 306–307).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 226–27 (Di Napoli, III, 308–11).

human beings of “very lofty matters” (*res altissimas*), not through such natural means as melancholy, but by unmediated revelation. Pre-eminently illustrating this principle for Campanella were St. Caterina, St. Brigid, and St. Francesco, the likes of whom, he exulted, “being elevated into the cloud-covered heavens and fervid in their love of God, were not conquered by corporeality, but instead conquered over it.”²¹⁶ Deriding the supposed Peripatetic contention that “there cannot be prophets who lack the passions of melancholics,” Campanella countered that “all the apostles cannot have been atrabilious, as Aristotle would have it.”²¹⁷ The same naturalist fallacy, complained Campanella, had led the Peripatetics “to attribute the prophecies of St. Brigid and St. Caterina to the humors, not reflecting that these women prophesied concerning divine matters, and concerning events which they confirmed by their own experience and by the meditations taking place within their hearts, not out of [melancholic] delirium, but in a state of complete sobriety (*optimo sensu, non ut abreptitiae*).”²¹⁸

Along the same lines Campanella sarcastically queried the Peripatetics in his *Liber medicinalium* as to “how Isaiah, by means of melancholy, foreknew the name of Cyrus seventy years before his birth?” Or again, “how did the preachers of the Gospel predict victory and the signs which are now present in the sun, moon, and stars, and which have come to pass for both their disciples and themselves?”²¹⁹ Or still again, as chided in his *Atheismus triumphatus*: “And what do you say, O Aristotle, when angels visibly appear to wakeful prophets and speak with them from hour to hour, as happened to Zaccharias, Peter, and others, and to the exceedingly strange sibyls, and to St. Caterina and St. Brigid?” Scolding the Peripatetics for what he saw as a *reductio ad absurdum* on their part, Campanella answered that “surely heated black bile is not able to accomplish these things beyond its own capacity (*extra se*), which by its inward nature is able to perform only a few things, and these always in the same way.”²²⁰

²¹⁶ *De sensu*, cap. 11, pp. 235–36.

²¹⁷ *Magia e Grazia*, art. 2, pp. 54–55.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

²¹⁹ Campanella, *Medicinalium iuxta propria principia, libri septem* (Lyons: Ex officina Joannis Pillenote, sumptibus Joannis Caffin, & Francisci Plaignard, 1635), lib. VI, cap. 3, pars 1, art. 2 (4–5), p. 339.

²²⁰ *Atheismus triumphatus*, cap. 7, p. 42.

Indeed, insisted Campanella in a further writing treating this subject, the *Libri astrologicorum*, Aristotle himself could not altogether ignore the need for something more elevated than melancholy to produce the kinds of prophetic powers he described, acknowledging at last that “the powers to divine, to compose songs, and to speak foreign languages cannot be attributed to a stupid humor, nor to stellar bodies, but solely to an intelligent cause.”²²¹ Unhappily, Campanella regretted to add, Aristotle’s occasional concessions in this connection were more than offset by his many more frequent attempts to relegate all forms of prophecy to nature. Concerning the critical point of disparity separating naturally from supernaturally instigated prophecy, Campanella maintained that the former “constitutes only a notion of causes in their still pregnant state, but not the effects themselves.” Failing to discern this critical distinction, he charged, the naturalist followers of Aristotle and Galen have unhappily confounded vague presentiments of the future based on “pregnant causes” for certain future effects of those causes. Accordingly, they “know nothing which is eternal, unless accidentally (*nisi per accidens*).”²²²

These and many other examples underscored for Campanella the deficiencies of the Aristotelian and Galenic views on prophecy, since, as he put it, “the black bile, heat, air, and the heavens, being stupid and insensate entities devoid of cognition and subject to the laws of nature, are unable to confer to us so marvelous a knowledge of future things.” All those things conferred by Aristotle to the inferior passions, Campanella asserted, are inherently incapable of producing such predictions as issue from the mouths of genuinely inspired prophets of God; these, he countered, are able to be produced only by “that divine part to which God confers the knowledge of His secrets.” Powers residing within nature, such as those of the black bile, the planets, and the air, are insufficient to meet this need, he maintained, because “these secrets belong, not to foreseeing creatures, but to Providence.” Those who deny these self-evident truths—self-evident, that is, to those illuminated with Christian faith—will discover that not only God condemns them. On completing their philosophical investigations they will also discover that “nature also condemns you.”²²³

²²¹ Campanella, *Astrologicorum libri VII*. . . (Frankfurt: 1630), art. III, append., p. 157.

²²² *Magia e grazia*, art. 2, p. 64.

²²³ *Atheismus triumphatus*, cap. 7, p. 42.

Prophecy that is truly “supernatural” (*supernaturalis*), Campanella declared with the idea of drawing out its wider religious implications, is made available solely through a divine illumination, and moreover is bestowed only on one who “considers himself to be immortal, preserves religion, and dedicates himself to the worship of the true and omnipotent God.” The true prophet who “knows what goods or evils God is about to apportion to man,” he professed against his theological backdrop, “knows this, not from the movements (*passionibus*) of the air or of the heavens, but through a revelation of angels and of God.” By virtue of the same sagacity by which he is accurately able to foretell what God has in store for human beings, the divine prophet “knows his own immortality, and that after death he will arrive at another life, and at either a reward or punishment from his good and evil deeds.”²²⁴

Granting Campanella’s theoretical distinction between divinely inspired and naturally instigated prophecy, we are still left with the moot point of how we are to make a distinction in practice. To this end Campanella offered a few telling clues. One test proposed is that those under the guidance of the divine form “predict future events in detail (*nominatim*), with no recourse to art or natural preparation.”²²⁵ Another test is that the inspired prophet easily recalls the substance of his prophecies, whereas the natural prophet does not. On one hand, “divine prophets remember very well what they have prophesied, since these have been brought about in an immortal mind (*in mente immortalis*), not in a corporeal spirit, and are ordained by a certain divine and excellent art.”²²⁶ Prophets taking their knowledge from nature, on the other hand, “after the spirit is calmed, do not recall what they have prophesied, since the very subtle spirit which received the impressions has evaporated.”²²⁷

Even those entrenched in the medical profession, Campanella pointed out, at times had to come to terms with the foregoing distinction between natural and supernatural powers of prophecy. Discovering that their natural categories inadequately explained many of the symptoms which they diagnosed in patients with exceptional divining abilities, for example, were “the physicians Fernelius and

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *De sensu*, p. 239.

²²⁷ *Magia e Grazia* art. 2, p. 66.

Codronchius, who together with Psellus correctly assigned these effects to the presence of demons and angels."²²⁸ Experience as well as reason teaches us, urged Campanella in his *Liber poëticarum* (completed 1596) "that the insensate elements of Aristotle and Galen cannot give the power of divination, unless perhaps by disposition, as especially in the case of melancholics." And even then, as Hippocrates should have enlightened both Aristotle and Galen, melancholy as easily works against prophecy as assists it. For among melancholics, Campanella cautioned, "the dark fumes impede reason, and the heat, although divine by nature as upheld by Hippocrates in his *Periar-chon*, increases the force, not of divination, but of nothing more than exhalation."²²⁹

Those taking the lead of Aristotle and Galen in this matter, complained Campanella, have failed to comprehend that a melancholy disposition which they hold to be "firm for memory, swift for reasoning and imagination, and subtle for apprehending" cannot account, even partially, for the eternal visions which might come into the prophet's head.²³⁰ Helping to promulgate this fallacy among the ancients, Campanella determined, was Cicero, who implicitly gave his approval to the naturalist interpretation of prophecy by calling to the attention of his readers that the ancient prophets often forgot what they had prophesied after their impressionable spirits had vanished and they had returned to sanity.²³¹ And among some more recent disseminators of the naturalist fallacy, "Avicenna, Pomponazzi, and others have believed the prophets to take their powers, not from God, but from the black bile."²³² Though assigning Ficino a notch above these in his philosophical hierarchy, Campanella still took him to task for contributing to this popular error by ascribing excessive precognitive powers to the melancholy humor, declaring in this regard that "this imaginary creation of Ficino is completely worthless" (*figmentum Ficini nihil valet*).²³³

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–59. Codronchi has been treated above, pp. 214–15. On Fernel see above, p. 365, and on Psellus, p. 84.

²²⁹ Campanella, *Poëticarum liber unus*, cap. 6, art. 3, in *Tutte le opere*, Vol. I, ed. Luigi Firpo (Verona: Mondadori, 1954), p. 1024.

²³⁰ *Libri medicinalium*, lib. VI, cap. 3, pars 1, art. 2 (4), p. 339.

²³¹ *De sensu*, p. 239.

²³² *Libri medicinalium*, lib. VI, cap. 3, pars 1, art. 2 (3), p. 339.

²³³ *Magia e Grazia*, art. 2, pp. 58–59.

The mistaken reasoning that had seduced the foregoing thinkers into perpetuating the naturalist fallacy of Aristotle, Campanella charged, is based on the misplaced presumption that an application of material heat can transform sensate stupidity into prophetic genius. "Aristotle," Campanella contended, "holds his opinion from the comparison of the nature of wine in an inebriated man, and Ficino from the experience of melancholic diviners. But each is equally deceived in his own way." After all, "if heat is not able by itself to compose songs and to speak languages, and to prophesy, much less will it be able to do so with black bile, which is incompatible with such functions."²³⁴ Expressing astonishment that "Ficino should elicit from insensate humors the spirits which are favorable to the understanding," Campanella puzzled as to "how a stupid and obscure black bile, which is better adept at terrifying the animal spirits and, by its filth, at impeding the reasoning faculty and rendering syllogisms unintelligible, can give prophecy?" Inasmuch as Galen as well as Aristotle held black bile to be of an earthen nature, and inasmuch as "the earth is the grossest and stupidest of all the elements," Campanella found it difficult to comprehend how either Ficino or Pomponazzi could believe that the same humor could be turned into an instrument of prophetic acuity and wisdom. On the contrary, attested Campanella, "it cannot not possibly increase such wisdom, either as cause or as disposition, but rather will impede it."²³⁵

Given Campanella's admitted attraction to the Telesian sensualist philosophy, we might be taken aback to find the name of Telesio added to his list of those who had succumbed to the naturalist fallacy. For if prophets were accurately able to predict the future by the use of the senses, "as appeared to be so for Telesio, Hippocrates, and Anaxagoras," wrote Campanella, "they would have been able to prophesy the Messiah and the renewal of the ages, as is testified in agreement with our [Christian] prophets by Cicero, Plato, Plutarch, and countless sibyls."²³⁶ Our puzzlement in this regard is dispelled, however, by the observation that Campanella did not adopt Telesian sensualism root and branch, but revised it to make it compatible with his supernaturalist outlook.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–59.

²³⁶ *Atheismus triumphatus*, cap. 7, p. 42.

“Consistent with his own principles,” acknowledged Campanella, Telesio even more rigorously than Aristotle “derived them from sensibles.” Thus Telesio, too, so far as his metaphysical and epistemological insights were uninformed by transcendent considerations, fell short in Campanella’s view of providing an adequate theory of prophetic insight, since those gifted with the highest forms of sensible knowledge “neither prophesy nor are knowledgeable of things which are absent from them, given that they are comprised of individualized and very subtle material.” Sharply contesting the Ficinian notion that melancholy is capable of entering in any substantial way into things of the inner spirit, Campanella found no more justification for this proposition in Telesio’s discovery that heat lies at the basis of cosmic activity than in the corresponding Aristotelian allegation that heated melancholy is capable of promoting extraordinary mental activity. For, Campanella reasoned, no matter how energized a mind might become on being enkindled by a natural agent like adust melancholy, it was necessarily prevented, without outside supernatural assistance, from traversing the ontological chasm separating finite nature from infinite supernature.

Closer to the truth of the matter than either Ficino or Telesio, concluded Campanella, were “the more skillful Platonists” (*Platonici peritiores*), among whom we can rest assured that Patrizi occupied a singular place in his mind. For these, Campanella attested, did not make the Peripatetic mistake of trying to arrive at supernatural truth through natural means, holding rather, in better conformity to the Catholic faith, “that prophecy cannot be attributed securely to either the stars or to the humors, but solely to the mind, since it has an innate cognition and participation which, when united to the body, is forgotten by reason of the opacity and fluidity of the body, as when drunkards forget.”²³⁷

In the context of a query into the requirements of prophecy, then, Campanella makes it clear that his appropriation of Telesio for his metaphysical and epistemological purposes was far from an uncritical one. As reaffirmed by his query into the genial requirements of prophecy, Campanella’s genial outlook better accorded with a Platonic theory of divine inspiration radically free of the senses than with one that, Telesio as much as Aristotle would have us believe,

²³⁷ *Magia e Grazia*, art. 2, pp. 58–60.

would have genial inspiration dependent on the senses. As indicated above, Campanella's way out this dilemma was to distinguish between the senses themselves in a way that better accorded with Platonic idealism—distinctions at first sight that do not appear fundamentally different from that made by Ficino following the same Platonic guidelines. But whereas the basic thrust of Ficino's genial doctrine was to subordinate Aristotelian sensualism to Platonic idealism, the corollary of which was the subordination of natural melancholy to divine frenzy, the basic thrust of Campanella's genial doctrine, as thrown into saliency with special cogency in the course of his deliberations on prophecy, was to expurgate Aristotelian sensualism and melancholy together from genial aspirations. What distinguished Campanella's philosophical strategy from that of Patrizi in this matter, whom he otherwise found to be a highly regarded precursor of his ideas, was in the acceptance into his "new metaphysics", if in a modified version that he considered to be more compatible with his supernaturalist tenets, of Telesian sensualist principles held by Patrizi to be no more concordant with his supersensualist philosophy than the corresponding sensualist principles of Aristotle.

In ineluctable proximity to the subject of prophecy in Campanella's mind, as in others touching on the same subject, was astrology, their connection consisting of the assumption that the stars could signal future behavior as well as impact on its present manifestations. Campanella's linkage of the stars and the humors in this connection, most pointedly spelled out in his *Libri astrologicorum*, reflects a longstanding cooperative relationship between the medical and astrological professions that was also a prominent feature of Ficino's genial outlook. Not to our surprise, however, his position on this subject more closely resembles Patrizi's disjunctive than Ficino's conjunctive one, with the query into prophecy once again serving as an instructive case in point. The planets, according to this view, are not merely extensions of nature bearing occult powers of regulation over the bodily humors, but rather, at a more elevated status, represent divinely installed intermediaries of the divine frenzies independently of the natural humors.

For Campanella it was no coincidence that a principal target of his derision, Pomponazzi, simultaneously accepted the principle of melancholy prophecy and astrological fatalism. For, in Pomponazzi's mind, the belief that prophecy can be incited by a natural humor was consistent with a belief that the planets ruling over the humors

control the events to which the prophecy pertains. Not that Campanella himself accepted a less ambitious role for astrology, stating agreement with St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Liber poeticarum*, for example, “that we are able to know the moral inclinations and natural affections from the stars.” But this did not mean for Campanella, any more than for St. Thomas, that a way was thereby opened for the subjection of the human will to the stars, since, he hastened to add, “it is clear that the stars, in disposing the body, dispense morals and natural powers only *per accidens*.”²³⁸

As Campanella invoked the identical authority to make the same point in his *De sensu*: “The stars do nothing more than induce and incline the dispositions.” Expressly rejecting the argument “that the stars have an inclining effect on the morals and on the mind,” together with the false teaching of Galen “that the morals of the mind follow the temperament of the body,” Campanella contrarily declared this naturalist exegesis of human genius to be “thoroughly false, inasmuch as the soul is able to assent or to dissent from the passions which are agitated by the complexion.”²³⁹ The planets, Campanella concurred with the orthodox Catholic position, do not determine the future of human beings but merely predispose them, together with the humors under their influence, in one way rather than in another.

At times, it is true, Campanella seemed to blur the sharply drawn line he had drawn between naturally and divinely instigated prophecy, as when he admitted to the proposition in his *Liber medicinalium* that natural conditions might make certain men more than others “apt for supernatural prophecy.” In the same breath reclarifying that demarcative line, however, he was quick to add that God might choose to instill unerring prophetic ability in one “without a natural aptitude.”²⁴⁰ In corresponding fashion Campanella seemed to blur another line of demarcation he had drawn between an astrological influence on human behavior, considered by him to lie wholly within the realm of natural causation, and inspiration issuing from a place located beyond the revolving planetary spheres. With Origen his authority, Campanella acknowledged that certain of the planets, when in a favorable relationship with one another and with those over

²³⁸ *Liber poeticarum*, cap. 6, art. 3, in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Firpo, p. 1020.

²³⁹ *De sensu*, lib. III, cap. 11, p. 239.

²⁴⁰ Campanella, *Medicinalium libri*, lib. VI, cap. 3, pars 1, art. 2 (4), p. 343.

whom they rule, "by effecting a beneficial sympathy, impress noble spirits on our minds which are lucid and suitable to divine influence and angelic visions."²⁴¹ By conceding to melancholy the ability to furnish favorable material conditions for the reception of divine illumination, that is to say, Campanella could scarcely deny an equal ability to the saturnine planet governing melancholy. The error of the Peripatetics, he contended, consisted of going further than this by ascribing an expeditious capacity not only to melancholy in the effectuation of genius, but also to the planet Saturn holding dominion over melancholy.

Much as Campanella recognized a role for the stars in helping to induce a disposition favorable for mystical and prophetic insight, he also recognized their role in inducing unfavorable dispositions. And of the astrological aids which the demons find to be particularly propitious in the execution of this effect, he contended in his *Libri astrologicorum*, especially suitable for their purposes, in tandem with the melancholy humor under its rule, is the planet Saturn. When an intelligent cause "abuses the humors for the purpose of vexing men," declared Campanella, we can be assured that it is not God, but the Devil, behind the said vexations. Much of the present misunderstanding in this regard, he further contended, confusing as it does demonic for divine causation in a genial act like that of prophecy, springs from the mistake of certain of the ancient gentiles, among whom the astronomer Ptolemy is specifically named, of failing to distinguish "wicked from good gods." Accordingly, when evil demons find entrance into human beings through the melancholy humor under saturnine auspices, Campanella charged, the gullible mistake them for divine spirits, which Christians call angels.²⁴² From the standpoint of astrology, then, Campanella deemed not only the melancholy humor to be a highly useful agent of the demons in forging divine revelation, but also the planet Saturn holding occult hegemony over melancholy.

For these reasons, Campanella reiterated a familiar theme of his genial outlook in this astrological context, "the doctrine of Aristotle in the *Problemata*, and of Galen, . . . and of Avicenna, and of others who believe divine afflatus to consist only of the power of melan-

²⁴¹ *De sensu*, lib. III, cap. 11, p. 239.

²⁴² *Libri astrologicorum*, art. III, append., p. 157.

choly, is very foolish. For the power to divine, compose songs, and speak foreign tongues, which Aristotle himself discovered and did not deny, cannot be attributed to a stupid humor, nor to stellar bodies, but only to an intelligent cause." Admittedly, he conceded to the witch hunters, such an "intelligent cause" might well be a demon, which in turn "abuses the humors for the purpose of vexing men."²⁴³ But to thereby confuse a melancholic effect for the demonic cause of that effect was to succumb to the naturalist fallacy of a Pomponazzi or, even more dangerous to our spiritual wellbeing, of a Machiavelli.

Inasmuch as Campanella was in basic agreement with the Platonically driven aphorism that "poetry is but prophecy versified," as the already-cited *Liber poeticarum* suggests, his view of a melancholy-free prophetic genius readily carried over into his deliberations on the origin and nature of poetic invention. "The poet," as Campanella expressly stated this agreement, "in truth, is, and is properly so-called, a prophet. For the gentile poets, as though apes of the prophets, emulated the prophets by divining and giving oracles."²⁴⁴ The same rule, Campanella reiterated a favored motif of the Platonists, holds for poetry as for prophecy, namely, that declaring "that the songs and divinations which rise up in us derive from external intelligences, either good or evil, using our spirit as though it were their instrument and conveying the capacity for divination to the soul."²⁴⁵ At the heart of Campanella's disquisitions over poetry, as over its prophetic sibling, lay the question, with Plato and Aristotle rendering opposing opinions in response, as to whether the answer to the mystery of human genius lies within or without the finite confines of nature. With respect to the creative impulse as to the ecstatic and prophetic impulse, despite his claim to have placed philosophy on novel foundations, Campanella did not so much add anything new to this subject as he reconfirmed a polarizing trend in philosophy already in force.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Liber poeticarum*, cap. 6, art. 3, in *Tutte le opere*, I, 1018. Concerning Campanella's vehement anti-Aristotelian position on the poetic art see Weinberg, *History of Literary Criticism*, II, 791-96.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1024.

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At a surface level, Campanella acknowledged in his *Liber poëticarum*, Aristotle's concept of poetic creativity shares a common theme with Plato's, with Plato holding "that poets and sibyls have been inspired by a divine frenzy, since their powers of divination and the composition of their songs exceed the power of the [natural] elements," and Aristotle, in corresponding fashion, holding that "poetry is the property of a versatile genius or of one incited by frenzy." But this superficial agreement between Plato and Aristotle on the frenzied nature of poetic activity, Campanella determined, only masked a critical difference between them at a deeper level of analysis, with Plato judiciously referring poetic genius to a supernatural inspiration and Aristotle injudiciously referring poetic genius to an enkindled natural humor. The reduction of poetic invention to a naturally evoked mental activity by Aristotle, determined Campanella, was of a piece with his reduction to nature of such supernatural entities as demons and angels. For the same Aristotle who "denies demons and angels to exist, and places God in the first orb with no care about inferior things," complained Campanella, also "believes that poetic and divine frenzy occurs by natural intemperance, just as some become frenzied by wine."²⁴⁶

Lending scriptural backing to Plato's position on this question for Campanella—and, by the same token, undercutting Aristotle's—was the example of David, whose divinely inspired musical skills readily translated for Campanella, as for Ficino before him, into divinely inspired poetic skills. Poetic oracles, Campanella maintained, are not delivered helter-skelter; rather, as pointed out by Plato, they are organized according to the harmonics of music, for which reason "the more skillful poets have need of a voice and of the art of singing, since poetic verse has taken its origin from music and, as I have stated, was not expressed in antiquity without singing."²⁴⁷ Again putting him at odds with Ficino, however, who had identified the divine frenzies with music, Campanella presented the example of David's exorcism of the melancholy Solomon's demon through musical means as biblical testimony that Ficino's further identification of melancholy with the divine frenzies had forced him into self-contradiction. The essential kinship between poetry and music, besides

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, cap. 6, art. 2, p. 1022.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1026.

underscoring for Campanella the divine origin of both, also underscored in his mind the unsuitability of a demon-attracting melancholy in assisting the sublime purposes of poetry. Whereas, as determined by Campanella, the harmonious strains of poetry belonged to David's remedy for Solomon, discordant melancholy, in service to the comparably discordant demons, belonged exclusively to Solomon's infirmity.

More problematic for Campanella's genial outlook than his affiliation of poetry with music, having previously served Ficino's contested genial theory in a collateral role associating melancholy with occult powers residing in nature, was his affiliation of poetry with magic. Campanella's response was to reiterate another basic Ficinian motif, the affiliation of music with magic, but to employ it in a way that ran counter to Ficino's association of magic with melancholy. "The art of poetry," exclaimed Campanella, "is the most perfect part of vocal magic." It is the intention of the poet as of the magician, Campanella affirmed, to move and transform the minds of his listeners by the same occult means by which his own mind has occultly been moved and transformed; for this reason, he echoed Ficino, we should view his poem as a kind of "magical instrument" (*instrumentum . . . magicum*) which he applies to his auditors as though it were a magical philtre and they the object of his magical activity.²⁴⁸ But whereas Ficino sought to accommodate the purifying objectives of music and magic alike to a theory of poetic melancholy, Campanella, finding in Patrizi a better guide in this regard, more consistently proposed a theory of poetic creativity purified of melancholy along with all the other nature-based contaminants obstructing the poet's vision.

Having, however, dispensed with melancholy as an aid to the poetic frenzy, Campanella, following the same reasoning as he applied to prophecy, perceived in melancholy a useful tool of the demons in their endeavor to counterfeit divinely inspired poetry. To this end, Campanella declared, "the Devil, in order to emulate the primal virtue, contrives to compose verses in his subjects (*in energumenis*), filling them with proclamations and errors of which we so often have read in our histories."²⁴⁹ For this reason the doctrine promulgated

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 1, p. 1016. Emphasizing the occult features of Campanella's thought is Walker, *Magic*, ch. 7, pp. 203 ff.

²⁴⁹ *De sensu*, lib. III, cap. II, p. 239.

by the Peripatetic school that a melancholy disposition is capable of producing inspired poetry represented a far more serious problem for Campanella than a mere error of philosophical judgment. It constituted in his eyes a seductive device, together with that claiming melancholy to be of assistance in prophecy, by which the Devil is enabled to lure his unsuspecting victims into his grasp.

This is not to say, Campanella noted, that the inspired poet necessarily escapes altogether from symptoms of melancholy, allowing, as in the parallel cases of mystical and prophetic alienation, that “we sometimes see poets so affected by melancholy that they seek out solitude and, as though excited by a disease, burst forth with songs.”²⁵⁰ But what Campanella did forcefully refute was the claim that saturnine emanations, the melancholy humor, or their combination are able to play an actively participative role in the facilitation of poetic genius. Much as Campanella determined the truly inspired poet to be essentially free of melancholy, he also considered him to be essentially free of planetary Saturn said to govern over melancholy. It is not by chance in this regard that Campanella placed one of his more pointed testaments to the dogma of free will in the midst of a tract addressed to poetic theory.²⁵¹

To be sure, Campanella did not deny that poetry can also come into being by means other than divine frenzy. As he made this more broadly conceived view of the poetic vocation clear in his utilization of the Davidic prototype for poetry: “As evidenced by David, who sang the Psalms with the help of a cithara and psalter, the poet does not recite unless he is either disposed by nature or is exalted by God.”²⁵² But deeming the composers of nature-based poetry to be either merely human or outrightly diabolical, the latter especially likely when melancholy plays a role in its prompting, Campanella saw the eloquence of their verses as paling in comparison to poetry truly inspired by God.

Poets limited to human powers alone, Campanella averred, among whom can be counted Horace, Ovid, and Catullus, “are disposed by nature to the measure of meters, and imitating morals, and become outstanding by hard study,” whereas certain other unnamed poets, being diabolically prompted, “furiously pronounce their oracles with-

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ See above, p. 433.

²⁵² *Liber poeticarum*, cap. 6, art. 3, p. 1026.

out understanding them, unless, that is, they are taught by external means." Finally, Campanella concluded his triadic list, are those poets who are truly infused with divine frenzy; these, he professed, "know what they are saying, and that they are taught by God, and divulge their oracles with sobriety."²⁵³ While allowing that melancholy might readily be found in at least some causative relationship with the previously stated inferior forms of poetic invention, Campanella vehemently denied such to be the case in divinely inspired forms of the poetic imagination.

* * *

Scholars of Campanella's ambitious campaign to reconstruct the foundations of philosophy can scarcely ignore the fact that his life chronologically coincided with that of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), whose scientific discoveries were also helping to force radical changes in philosophical thinking. Needless to say, however, the occult mysticism conditioning Campanella's overhaul of philosophy occupied a position at the polar antipodes from Galileo's Archimedian-inspired marriage of mathematical rationalism with inductive experimentation. The driving force of Campanella's philosophical reconstruction was not the scientific revolution, but the religious counterrevolution of the Catholic church. A necessary prelude to a reconstruction of philosophy, as Campanella saw it, was a deconstruction of the traditional synthesis between Christ, Plato, and Aristotle bequeathed to his age by medieval scholasticism and refurbished by Ficino. An epistemological correlative of Campanella's metaphysical deconstruction was his radical severance of natural melancholy from the dynamic of divinely inspired genius.

An unfortunate ramification of Campanella's genial theory is that, even as the Galilean and Cartesian modes of speculation were increasingly making it anachronistic, it fostered a demonological way of thinking that continued to feed the witch hysteria. In this way of thinking even the acknowledgment of natural melancholy in an accused witch did not help her case, since melancholy had long been held by the demonologists to be a characteristic outward sign of inward diabolical machination. A more attractive ramification of Campanella's genial theory, however, lay in his presumption that

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

favorable forms of human genius—mystical-contemplative, prophetic, poetic, philosophical, and the like—owe neither to natural or diabolical dispositions, but to a divine gift.

In this regard Campanella's basic concurrence with the Platonic doctrine of divine frenzy, despite being welded to a Telesian metaphysical system, bears certain resemblances to the genial theory of Ficino. Unlike Ficino, however, and more like the patently anti-Peripatetic Platonist Patrizi, Campanella sought to free his metaphysical system from what he considered to be an unjustified intrusion of Aristotelian naturalism. As an integral part of that program, he sought to expunge from a theory of divinely inspired genius ascribed to Plato a theory of melancholy genius ascribed to Aristotle.

If we are to seek another sixteenth-century writer who can be said, if on a far less ambitious scale, to closely approximate Campanella's efforts in this regard, it is the Luccan bishop of Montalto, Gaspare Marcucci (fl. 1624–1644), as set forth in his *Quadripartitum melancholicum*. Like Campanella, Marcucci centered much of his attention in this tract around two particular genial expressions: the first, demonic genius, and the second, prophetic genius. In the first of these instances Marcucci took Aristotle to task for implying that those said to be demonically possessed were merely suffering from fits of the black bile, a proposition which could be personally refuted on any given day, he suggested, by observing the rite of exorcism. And in the second instance, in response to the question “whether melancholics can prophesy,” Marcucci answered in the negative, declaring genuine prophetic ability to spring, not from a mere natural humor, but from a divine inspiration independent of natural mediation.²⁵⁴

From a demonological point of view Marcucci, like Campanella, could not conceive of the kinds of sorcerous evils attributed to witches as owing to anything else but demons acting through maleficent human agents. Granting that melancholy can also be present in those said to be demonically possessed, Marcucci answered that this is because the demons are able to operate in their chosen human vessels “both naturally and supernaturally” (*tum naturaliter tum supernaturaliter*).²⁵⁵ When he came to the further subject of prophecy, however,

²⁵⁴ Gaspare Marcucci, *Quadripartitum melancholicum*. . . (Rome: Ex Typographia Andreae Phaei, 1645), pars I, cap. 25, p. 67; pars II, cap. 18, pp. 147–48. On this tract see Thorndike, *Magic*, VIII, pp. 511–13, and Schleiner, *Melancholy*, pp. 54–55.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, cap. 25, p. 70.

Marcucci, again in basic agreement with Campanella, construed melancholy to be, not a facilitator of divine inspiration as the purveyors of the vogue inaugurated by Ficino would have us believe, but rather its impediment. Like Campanella, Marcucci could not conceive of moving from mere guesswork in the prophetic act to a position of absolute certainty without help from the supernatural beyond. While typically allowing melancholy to counterfeit prophets under demonic aegis, Marcucci denied it altogether to true prophets of God, since, he noted, the potency of prophecy “exceeds the potency of the humor” (*haec enim illius succi vires excedunt*).²⁵⁶

In this manner Marcucci, in underlying rapport with the recently deceased Campanella, reiterated during the so-called “age of reason” what was also a principal theme of the late Renaissance. The immortal human soul, as this theme went, at bottom bears no proportion with the rationally comprehensible natural world, but only with the fideistically illuminated realm of God. A corollary of this thesis, shared alike by the skeptical fideists and by Platonists intent on liberating their philosophical principles from Aristotelian entanglements, is that human genius, constituting the acme of the immortal soul, bears no proportion with a natural melancholy humor, but only with supernatural effusions originating in Heaven.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, cap. 25, p. 67.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

“Only through his genius may man survive, everything else will die (*Vivitur in genio, caetera mortis erunt*).” Thus does a Belgian physician who spent much of his professional career in Italy, Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), put in capsule form in his anatomically groundbreaking *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) the central issue of the Renaissance debate over the origin of genius.¹ On which side one falls in this debate depends on how one interprets the meaning of the life-death antithesis indicated in Vesalius’ dictum, with one party to the dispute, following Plato, extending the reach of genial aspiration to the eternally infinite, and another party, following Aristotle and Galen, limiting that reach to the boundaries of finite nature. The key role of melancholy in this debate, a commonly observed symptom of overweening genial aspiration, hinged on the question of whether melancholy is capable of serving as a material agent of a supernaturally born impetus or, conversely, whether the genial powers residing within melancholy can be made intelligible by a wholly nature-based analysis.

That the philosophical dilemma raised by the Renaissance melancholy question is still with us is cogently illustrated in a passage incorporated by Thomas Mann into his modern reworking of the Faust legend. As Mann has his narrator Zeitblom characterize the psychic anguish of his study, the musical prodigy Adrian Leverkühn:

Was I not right to say that the depressive and the exalted states of the artist, illness and health, are by no means sharply divided from each other? That rather in illness . . . elements of health are at work, and elements of illness, working geniuslike, are carried over into

¹ Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (Basel: Ex officina Joannis Oporini, 1543; facsimile, Brussels: Medicinæ Historia, 1970), p. 164. The translation is by Cronin, *Flowering of Renaissance*, p. 146. This inscription is placed on the base of an altar against which, significantly, an anatomically correct skeleton is leaning while assuming a characteristically melancholy pose, chin supported by one hand and the other hand covering a skull. Vesalius occupied chairs in surgery and anatomy at the University of Padua during the composition and printing of this text.

health? . . . genius is a form of vital power deeply experienced in illness, creating out of illness, through illness creative.²

In this contemporary restatement of the melancholy problem we again discern an obscuration of the fine line partitioning theoretically opposing concepts of psychic alienation: one viewing it as a pathological state in need of curing, and the other, as a psychological requisite of creative genius. At the same time it leaves the question open as to origin of genius, leaving to the reader's prejudices the choice of whether it issues from a supernatural source, is the result of wholly natural causes, or is the product of the intersection between supernatural and natural forces.

An ancient prototype epitomizing this question for Renaissance thought, we have demonstrated, was the mythical hero, thrust into prominence not only by the humanist literature of the Renaissance, but also by the medical literature under the heading of heroic love, a species of melancholy. "The heroic quest in the postchivalric age," the authors of a recent study of Renaissance love melancholy observe, "becomes a narcissistic preoccupation with the self in confrontation with a foreordained grief over the unattainability of the blessed object, a grief in turn celebrated in the eroticized deliberations of poetry."³ Putting this insight another way: the Renaissance poets of heroes vicariously projected into their paragons of virtue a frustration of their own amatory drive to achieve union with an envisioned object of desire, causing them, like the heroes they depicted, to succumb to melancholy. What is not always clear is whether their melancholy was something to be despised as an impediment to their heroic-like aspirations or extolled as its abettor. In their characteristically ambivalent answers to this question they shared common ground with other alienated types such as mystics, prophets, and philosophers who similarly found themselves caught in the middle between noble aspirations and an ignoble infirmity.

When the object of that amorous desire was located in the infinite, as it was by Bruno, it followed that the melancholy suffering ensuing from that desire was also infinite. The restless surge of (in Bruno's term) "the heroic frenzies" to break through the barriers of finite

² Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 354-55.

³ Beecher and Ciavolletta, pt. I: *Ferrand*, pp. 157-58.

nature, while radically distinguishable from the state of diseased alienation described in the medical tracts, nevertheless shared with the symptoms of infirm alienation a common physiological trait—one, as it happened, which mystics and prophets also shared with those deemed by the theologians to be demoniacs. For divinely instigated alienation, as the mystics and prophets of history have often illustrated, is just as wont to stir up the agitations of natural melancholy as its diabolically instigated counterpart. By extension, so is the alienation of philosophers, poets, artists, and their sundry genial kin who envision what they are about in the ecstatic and illuminative terms of the mystics and prophets. The “heroic quest in the postchilvaric age” referred to above became translatable, according to a Renaissance and post-Renaissance vogue capitalizing on a chance resemblance between the Greek words *eros* and *heros*, into powers of human genius impelled by what appeared to many to be a union of supernatural inspiration with natural melancholy.

The foregoing chapters are rife with evidence that the supposition of an inward kinship between melancholic alienation and genius, still today a fashionable motif of literary and philosophical thought, found especially favorable soil for its premodern cultivation and propagation in the Italian Renaissance. Also presented in these chapters, however, categorized under the headings of traditional Galenic medicine, theology, and humanism, have been set forth a number of obstacles to an acceptance of that supposition also present on Italian soil. The ingrained regulative methods of these disciplines, we have established, had the effect more of deterring than promoting a theory of melancholy genius: corporeal medicine, by viewing the melancholy as detrimental to the equilibrium conceived as the very definition of a healthy mind and body; theology, by associating melancholy exclusively with the inferior demonic realm from which the immortal soul is divinely empowered to extricate itself in preparation for eternal salvation; and humanism, by viewing melancholy as violating both the inborn communal nature of human beings, distinguishing them from solitary beasts, and the inborn proclivity of a healthy mind to seek a rational middle between extremes. Yet in the very lap of each of these disciplines, as we have also brought out, was seeded an antithetical theory of melancholy genius that would come to flower in subsequent centuries.

The principal philosophical conveyors of the genial theories pertinent to the present study, we have established, were the Platonists

and Aristotelians, with the former availing themselves of such dialogues as the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Ion* ascribing genial powers to a divine frenzy, and the latter turning primarily to a treatise popularly but errantly believed through the centuries to be authored by the Stagyrite himself, the *Problemata*, associating genial powers with the natural melancholy humor. Human genius, Plato had maintained through his mouthpiece Socrates, exhibits characteristics of frenzied alienation betraying a greater-than-earthly origin of the human soul, with their expressions divisible into into four principal branches: mystical ecstasy; prophetic illumination; the rapture of love in all its variant expressions, including the philosophical love of ideas; and rare powers of poetic and artistic creativity. These favorable genial forms, according to the Platonists, are the flip side of the coin from that evil sort of genius instilled by demons in witches and sorcerers. With pseudo-Aristotle to guide them, on the other hand, the Peripatetics beheld in the occult powers of melancholy a natural explanation for those same marvelous powers of mind.

Simultaneously drawing on both genial theories at once, Platonic and Aristotelian, the late quattrocento Platonist Ficino systematically fused them into a unified theory whereby, as he saw it, exceptional insight and sagacity at the supernal heights of the soul's upward journey necessarily entails melancholic repercussions in the mundane depths—the corporeal price, as it were, to be paid for the soul's "heroic" endeavor to traverse the rationally unbridgeable gulf separating finite and transient nature from infinite and eternal supernature. As we have also established, however, the matter did not simply end there. Even as a vogue of melancholy genius was put into place on the heels of Ficino's teachings, conditions were also becoming ripe for a dissolution of Ficino's synthesized theory—this by reason not only of persisting medical, humanist, and theological obstacles, carried over from the previous centuries, emphasizing the precedence of normative rules of human conduct over transnormative ones, but also of a divisive trend within Renaissance philosophy itself holding the Platonic frenzies and natural melancholy to be intrinsically at variance with one another.

Occupying one side of the divide separating the naturalist and supernaturalist genial theories were certain Platonist and skeptical fideists who, while allowing access to melancholy by the demons in its well known role as the "Devil's bath," were persuaded that melan-

choly was incompatible with the sublime demands of divine inspiration. And occupying the other side of that divide were certain Aristotelians who, not content with an Averroist compromise between the two genial doctrines in its essentials indistinguishable from that of the Platonist Ficino, perceived in a moderately inflamed melancholy humor a sufficient answer to the kinds of genial powers assigned by the Platonists to the divine frenzies. Just as significant for our purposes as the disagreements between these two schools of thought on the genius question was their underlying agreement that the hybrid Platonic-Aristotelian notion of genius put into motion by Ficino could no longer be credibly sustained. Even as the two sides to this controversy disagreed on the origin of genius, they nevertheless concurred that, just as there is no proportion between divinity and humanity, so can there be no proportion between divine frenzy and natural melancholy.

Stuart Clark, who has persuasively placed early modern demonology within a larger psychosocial framework of the early modern period characterized by a tendency to state propositions in terms of linguistic contrarities and inversions, by the same token has also presented a fitting framework for coming to terms with the divide separating a supernatural from a natural explanation of genius. As Clark summarizes this polarization of thought:

Truth and error, righteousness and sin, the Church and its enemies, Jerusalem and Babylon—it is as though things that had hitherto been (and would again) be seen as subject to gradation were re-categorized in terms of absolute opposition. The terms of traditional logic capture this exactly. Whereas for Aristotle the contraries good/bad could admit an intermediate (neither good nor bad) and were thus an example of the sub-group *species contraria mediata*, in early modern Europe they could not, and were classed accordingly among *species contraria immediata*. One of them now had to be affirmed, there being no intervening species.⁴

The identical “terms of traditional logic” which helped to impel a polar opposition between divinely and demonically governed realms under the pressures of early modern events perforce also helped to impel a comparable opposition between naturalist and supernaturalist genial theories.

⁴ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 61.

These conflicting developments within Renaissance philosophy, we have also seen, coincided with similar schismatic tendencies within the field of Hermetic and Neoplatonic magic which Ficino had also put into vogue in conjunction with his Platonism. For, as conceived by Ficino, the *magus* represented a special case of the genial hero, one who, as his young associate Pico famously depicted him in his oration on human dignity, represents a mediating intellectual and operative link between earth and Heaven. In the matter of magic as in that of traditional philosophy, it has been shown, Ficino attempted to stake out a middle ground between the naturalist and supernaturalist positions. But the strain of events in the later Renaissance, including the strain of the witch trials, forced magic into much the same kind of polarizing course as the conventional philosophy of the dogmatic schools. Much as Ficino's amalgamation of the Platonic frenzy doctrine and the Aristotelian doctrine of melancholy genius became undone under the pressures placed upon it by late Renaissance and Reformation developments, so did the corresponding amalgamation between demonic and natural magic. Correlatively displaying signs of the supernaturalist-naturalist split during this period was the "science" claimed to work in close cooperation with magic, astrology, which increasingly became dichotomized along the same lines as the occult disciplines to which it was customarily subjected.

Renaissance magic, then, together with art of astrology in its service, demonstrated its ability to bend to either side of the debate in question, depending on which side of the naturalist-supernaturalist split a given magus stood. For the supernaturalists, drawing chiefly on Plato, licit "natural magic"—*magia naturalis*—was but divine magic once removed, whereas for their naturalist counterparts natural magic was a primary animating and wonder-working power latently present within nature itself. In this regard the query into the origin of human genius, which the foremost Renaissance theorists believed to constitute a supreme example of mysterious invisible power residing in the world but appearing to be inspired by a power beyond it, acted as a critical pivot around which this debate between naturalism and supernaturalism could turn.

Encouraging and reinforcing these divisive tendencies in dogmatic philosophy was a drift to skepticism, which issued, as we have shown, as much from practical as from theoretical considerations. Whether prompted by formal adherence to the ancient Pyrrhonist tradition

or merely by such operational needs as were intrinsically built into the medical profession, Renaissance skepticism proved itself to be a double-edged sword. Under the auspices of a formal Pyrrhonist like Gianfrancesco Pico, skepticism could be invoked to support the thesis of supernaturally induced genius which is graspable, not rationally, but fideistically. As John Owen has written in this regard, "so far from destroying, skeptical thought gives new birth and energy to the religious faculty."⁵ But skepticism, as illustrated by Pomponazzi and Cardano, could also conceivably have the opposite effect of casting doubt on the thesis of supernaturally instigated genius. Pomponazzi's skepticism, it has been brought out, logically followed from his radical Aristotelian principles. Cardano's, on the other hand, like that of Avicenna before him, arose from a quite different set of circumstances. For in his role as a corporeal physician, quite apart from Platonic philosophical propensities, Cardano demonstrated a clinically operational kind of skepticism that had the effect of complementing Pomponazzi's theoretical precepts in the campaign to end the witch persecutions.

It was, however, the former line of resistance to the witch hysteria, the theoretical one, which one modern scholar, Henri Busson, has credited with doing the most to neutralize its unsettling effects. Of the treatises composed to counter those of the more zealous persecutors of witches, Busson has written, Pomponazzi's *De incantationibus* "is the source of all those which followed." And serving as a prime conduit of this attitude to northern thought by virtue of his many years spent beyond the Alps, Busson adds, was Vanini, who resumed "this attack in a more popular form," maintaining that the gullibility induced in frenetic women by melancholy adequately explains "the mysteries, including the gift of languages, which are attributed to the possessed."⁶ In corresponding fashion, as has been pointed out, radical Italian naturalists like Pomponazzi and Vanini were also at the forefront of those who determined that favorable genius of the type attributed to solitary mystics, prophetic clairvoyants, and philosophical, poetic, and artistic lovers of truth and beauty

⁵ John Owen, *The Skeptics of the Italian Renaissance* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1908, 1970), intro., p. xiv.

⁶ Henri Busson, *La Pensée Religieuse Française de Charron à Pascal* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1933), ch. 7: "La Foi, la Science, et le Surnaturel," p. 361.

could be reduced to fits of melancholy. In this regard, too, the Renaissance Aristotelians refurbished an ancient idea which found considerable receptivity not only in Italy, but also in the world beyond the Alps.⁷

It has been stated that Pomponazzi was “the last Scholastic and the first man of the Enlightenment.”⁸ Emphasis in this asseveration should be placed at least as much on Pomponazzi’s role as a repository of medieval scholastic values as on his role as a precursor of modern “enlightened” ones. If it can be said that Pomponazzi, accused by Campanella of being a philosophical counterpart to the ethical relativist Machiavelli, helped to prepare the way for Enlightenment materialism, it should also be pointed out that the methods he adopted for doing so betrays his immersion in a longstanding philosophical tradition that, in affiliation with the traditions of medicine, was inherently geared to a naturalization of the supernatural. Having, we have seen, eradicated supernaturally transcendent determinants from his philosophical outlook, whether they be demons, angels, or God, Pomponazzi effectively transferred the mysterious powers widely attributed to those determinants to the finite compass of nature itself. A test case was human genius, which even a Pomponazzi did not presume to reduce to a mere mechanical device. If heated melancholy better explained for Pomponazzi the features which his philosophical opponents ascribed to divine inspiration, the effect was to imbue the melancholy humor, together with the saturnine planet said to govern it, with occult powers exerting much the same kind of invisible force on the human intellect as that claimed by the Platonists.

At the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum from that occupied by Pomponazzi are the Platonist Patrizi and his Telesian heir Campanella, the latter who chronologically bridged the Renaissance with the seventeenth century “age of reason.” But while an exact contemporary of Descartes and Bacon beyond the Alps, and of Galileo on his own Italian side, as we brought out in the foregoing chapter, Campanella was of a far different temperament than those fecundly innovative influences on subsequent cultural history. If in

⁷ See, e.g., Hans Thüme, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Geniebegriffs in England* (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer, 1927), with sundry Italian influences on the dominant English concepts of genius emphasized, pp. 5 ff.

⁸ Randall, introd. to Pomponazzi’s *On Immortality*, in Cassirer et al., ed. *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, pp. 267–68. Cf. *Career of Philosophy*, p. 73.

some ways Campanella showed signs of being, as a recent study suggests in its title, a “Renaissance pioneer of modern thought,”⁹ in other more significant ways, among which his treatment of the genius question stands out, he revealed greater rapport with the conservative past than with the revolutionary future.

According to the Cardano specialist Markus Fierz, with an eye to his subject’s impact on the post-Renaissance “age of reason” symbolized by the advent of Galileo: “When Galileo set out to found a new science, he firmly denounced all forms of occultism.”¹⁰ In seeming contrast to Galileo, it can be inferred from the foregoing pages, Campanella represents a residuum of the occult traditions against which Galileo was reacting. In each of the previously treated areas—demonology, mystical ecstasy, extraordinary philosophical acumen, prophetic illumination, and poetic inspiration—Campanella would appear to be rooted far more in the conservative medieval traditions than in those insurrectional intellectual currents portending the impending scientific revolution. If Campanella can be said to constitute a kind of intellectual bridge to the modern world, it was more as a bridge to modern mystical and theosophical tendencies in opposition to Galilean scientific theory than to the modern purveyors of Galilean principles.

Professor Garin has written concerning Campanella’s philosophical program: “There is no doubt that in many respects Campanella’s thought goes beyond the limits of Renaissance philosophy. It is directly related to the religious movement that stems from the Counter-Reformation, to the political controversies nourished by the reaction to Machiavelli and to the scientific interests which culminate in Galilei.” Garin’s further contention in this regard that Campanella professed agreement with Machiavellianism, “which he professed openly and naively in spite of persistent condemnations,” has been amply refuted

⁹ Bonansea, *Campanella* (see above, p. 413n). Cf. Paolo Rossi, *Philosophy, Technology, and the Arts*, trans. Salvator Attanasio, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 101–2, underscoring Campanella’s “modernism” by pointing up his appreciation for such modern novelties as the geographical discoveries of Columbus and the printing press.

¹⁰ Fierz, *Cardano*, postscript, p. 167. For recent scholarly queries into the larger European-wide clash between magic and science see Brian Vickers, ed. *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), esp. Vickers’ own contribution under the title: “Analogy versus Identity: the Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580–1660,” pp. 95 ff.

in the present work.¹¹ On the contrary, Campanella thoroughly and adamantly rejected Machiavellianism, which he perceived to be the ethical counterpart to Pomponazzi's naturalism.

Far from Campanella's thought going "beyond the limits of Renaissance philosophy," as Garin has suggested, it revealed an underlying continuity with a major trend of late Renaissance thought, becoming ever more marked as the Reformation theological struggles pressed upon it, by which the supernatural explanation for human genius became radically severed from the natural explanation. One intellectual correlative of this severance has been shown to be a skeptical opposition to all philosophical speculation about the nature of human genius in the name of Christian faith. But another has been shown to be a growing opposition between theories of human genius within the dogmatic schools themselves, with the Platonists increasingly coming into implicit alliance with the skeptical fideists in finding the Peripatetic doctrine of melancholy genius to be incompatible with a doctrine of divinely endowed genial powers. Campanella, with a wide-ranging philosophical compass comparable to that of the vehemently anti-Peripatetic predecessor Patrizi, also appears to have followed Patrizi in utilizing philosophy to demonstrate the limits of philosophy. And also for Campanella as for Patrizi, a primary issue around which that strategy could revolve was the question of whether human genius owes to a natural disposition or to a supernatural inspiration.

The naturalist-supernaturalist split over the origin of human genius, as the subtitle to the present study indicates, stands at "the threshold of the scientific revolution." Concurrently with this groundbreaking movement, the Platonic inspiration theory demonstrated its ability to influence philosophical thought not so much in antagonistic hostility to science as in a symbiotic association with science. To the degree that the exponents of Platonic supernaturalism have taken issue with science, we have seen, the object of their hostility has primarily been, not science *per se*, but science's reduction of life's mysteries, including the mystery of genius, to mechanical or materialistic models. Concurrently with the intellectual breakthrough that we have become accustomed to identify with the scientific revolution, the tense

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

interplay between the legacy of naturalism bequeathed by the Aristotelian and Galenic traditions and the legacy of supernaturalism bequeathed by the Platonic tradition followed the same pattern. In its post-Renaissance as in its pre-Renaissance and Renaissance formulations, as it will now be our turn to indicate in a concluding postscript to the present study, the query into the mysterious power of mind known as genius served to confirm the validity of this historical observation.

* * *

“The lunatick, the lover, and the poet,” muses Shakespeare’s The-seus in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (V, i, 7), “are of imagination all compact.” The hairline division between insanity and genius indicated in these famous lines was subsequently reaffirmed by John Dryden in the asseveration contained in his *Absalom and Archithophel* (I, 163) that “great wits are sure to madness near allied,/And thin partitions do their bounds divide.” Putting the same notion into prose form in the following century, Denis Diderot exulted at the pinnacle of the European Enlightenment: “How near is genius to madness! Yet one is locked up and bound with chains whilst to the other we raise monuments.”¹² Bringing the supposition of an interconnection between genius and insanity to full flower were the nineteenth century romantic poets, among whom Charles Baudelaire, for example, suggested in a poetic plaint *de la misère, de la maladie et de la mélancolie*,¹³ that his melancholy despondency was in some way bound up with his rare powers of literary expression. These and many other comparable evocations of melancholy by writers of the post-Renaissance centuries attest to a strong persistence to the modern period of the postulate popularized during the Renaissance that the alienations of genius and madness, turning as they do on the same imaginative pivot, are readily translatable into one another. What is not always made clear in writers like the above, however, is whether the melancholy they

¹² Denis Diderot, cited in Ernst Kretschmer, *The Psychology of Men of Genius*, trans. R.B. Cattell (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1931), p. 4. For the further impact of the theory of melancholy genius on the Enlightenment see Hans-Jürgen Schings, *Melancholie und Aufklärung: Melancholiker und ihre Kritiker in Erfahrungswissenschaft und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1977).

¹³ Charles Baudelaire, *Journaux Intimes*, ed. Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1949), p. 41.

have beheld as attaching to rare powers of genius is a wanted psychic aid to the invigoration of the mind or its unwanted effect.

Putting his emphasis on the latter reading of melancholy is a recent article by H.-Günter Schmitz, whose special attention to specifically religious expressions of melancholy—as the “Devil’s bath,” as a product of religious guilt and despair, and as a gradually purged material affiliate of a mystical “dark night of the soul”—leaves little room for its favorable reading along the lines laid down by Ficino. In each of these instances, Schmitz instructs us, the black bile better corresponds to the ignoble state from which a divinely prodded soul is endeavoring to escape than the noble state it is attempting to realize. To be sure, Schmitz does not rule out the Ficinian theory of melancholy genius as having relevance to his subject, observing in this regard that, under its guidance, the commonly shared experience of melancholy by scholars and artists “was now invested with a special charisma: it could now be conceived as the necessary prerequisite and price to be paid for such human greatness as Renaissance intellectuals after Petrarca dreamed of.”¹⁴ Significantly, however, it is not under the heading of melancholy genius that Schmitz concludes his essay, but under the heading: “The overcoming of melancholy in art.” With Goëthe a foremost case in point Schmitz gives his last word, not to a Ficinian conception of melancholy as a constructive facilitator of poetic and artistic genius, but to a conception of poetry and art as a therapeutic response to melancholy.¹⁵ Viewed within this wider compass of our mental horizon, melancholy can just as readily be construed as a force to be countered and neutralized by a genial mind as one to be cultivated. In post-Renaissance as in Renaissance literature, the supreme ancient paradigm on which the ambiguity of genial melancholy has been characteristically based is of the aspiring hero.

Edgar Zilsel, in his *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes*, has put this genial-heroic affiliation in no uncertain terms—this on the basis of some of the sources also bolstering the present study. “Our ideas of genius,” writes Zilsel, “are manifestly rooted in the very natural human need to admire and revere physically and spiritually sur-

¹⁴ Schmitz, “Melancholieproblem,” p. 148.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 156 ff. For a poetic illustration of this principle by Goëthe see p. 151.

passing individuals. The hero is the forerunner of the genius.”¹⁶ Bringing this idea up-to-date is Rebecca Goldstein, observing in her *Mind-Body Problem* that “everyone loves a hero” but differ among one another as to “who the heroes are, because we differ over what matters.” Goldstein also finds a suitable example of her observation about heroic-like genius close-to-home. “Here in Princeton,” she points out, “what matters is intelligence, the people who matter are the intelligent, and the people who matter most, the heroes, are the geniuses.”¹⁷

A student of ancient philosophy with an eye to its connection with contemporary philosophical developments, Wilhelm Szilasi, has written in the existentialist mode of addressing this issue: “The more philosophy holds sway over existence (*das Dasein*), all the more closed-in existence becomes and all the more prepared it is to stand over against the darkness which surrounds it on all sides. For philosophy stands at the brink between the being of the whole and nothingness.” In this capacity, Szilasi further speculates, “philosophy is the vigilance of the spirit as it stands ready at its threatened outpost.”¹⁸ Expressly drawing on both Plato and Aristotle to cast light on his subject, Szilasi particularly finds relevant to his purpose a passage from the Aristotelian *Problemata* which has also cropped up numerous times in the present study. Taking his lead from the comparison by the author of that text between melancholy and inebriation, a basic characteristic of one vested with the “heroic” task of preserving existence from dissolution in the dark void of nothingness, Szilasi has declared that “drunkenness signifies an essential moment of both melancholy and philosophy.”¹⁹

The core principle recognized by Szilasi as shared by philosophy and the melancholic temperament is of superabundance or excessiveness. As he has noted in this regard: “Whoever is excessive (*übermässig*) by nature, that is, whose existence is determined by superabundance (*Überschwänglichkeit*), needs no other cause for his excessiveness. His melancholy and drunkenness are original and perpetual.”²⁰

¹⁶ Edgar Zilsel, *Die Entstehung des Geniebegriffes: Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Antike und des Frühkapitalismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck]), 1926, p. 3.

¹⁷ Rebecca Goldstein, *The Mind-Body Problem: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 22.

¹⁸ Wilhelm Szilasi, *Macht und Ohnmacht des Geistes. . .* (Bern: Verlag A. Francke, A.G., 1946), p. 296.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

Such inebriated and melancholic yearning on the part of the philosopher, as pseudo-Aristotle pointed out to Szilasi, can be likened to that of the ancient heroes, who prototypically illustrated, at the price of excruciating melancholic afflictions, that they could not accept the conventional restrictions placed upon ordinary man. Philosophers, according to this view, are divinely chosen repositories of a divine mandate which cannot be properly carried out without the consequence of severe melancholic suffering. As Szilasi spells out this idea:

To the nature of the melancholic belongs the mandate (*Auftrag*), which he receives from God, to struggle against the creations of the threatening darkness, like Hercules or Bellerophon, or against himself and his environment, that is, against the insensitivity and indolence of the heart, like Ajax. It is like a mandate which, if it is carried out, signifies the insatiable nature of the demand, and which leaves wounds behind that, like nature itself, burst open . . . The philosophers, these heroes of humanity, these melancholics out of the excessiveness of their humanity, as Empedocles, Socrates, Plato, also have a mandate from the gods, that is, from the unity of being. . . . A mandate which ever leaves wounds behind, to be sure, imposed by virtue of their own greatness, as revenge for the secrets to which they have penetrated and which they wish to reveal.²¹

The word “philosophers” in the above passage, as revealed in the foregoing chapters, can just as readily be rendered by the words “mystics,” “prophets,” and “poets,” the latter extended to embrace creative activity among the visual arts. For these too, by reason of the same trait of “excessiveness” which Szilasi has ascribed to philosophers, have been widely said to be “heroes of humanity” who have been commissioned with a divine mandate. And these too, like the melancholic lovers of wisdom known as philosophers, have been widely depicted as tormented by melancholic afflictions in conjunction with their acceptance of that heavenly-sent mandate. According to the melded Platonic-Aristotelian tradition propelling this doctrine into universal vogue during the Renaissance, mystics, prophets, and poet-artists take up a position with philosophical lovers “at the brink between the whole and nothingness.” In this capacity they too, as Szilasi would have it, have been commissioned with the “heroic” mandate to preserve luminous existence from descending into the darkness of nothingness. Consequently they too are required to dis-

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 301–302.

play melancholic wounds “imposed by the virtue of their own greatness, as revenge for the secrets to which they have penetrated and which they wish to reveal.” As Szilasi nicely summarizes this existentialist interpretation of the melancholy problem in this more general sense: “The modern genial conception rests on the premise that an extraordinary gift of ‘genius’ must become purchased through melancholy, that is, through painful isolation, through existential crises and boundary-situations (*existentielle Krisen und Grenzsituationen*), and through psychic anomalies reaching to the point of madness.”²²

The existentialist manner of expressing the dilemma of human genius, with its presumption that its attending melancholy is the price the mind is compelled to pay for its heroic mandate, at first glance appears to have sidestepped the events of the scientific revolution as though they had never happened. Such an existentially construed melancholic seems to beckon, not to the exoterically formulated speculations of Galileo, but to the esoterically formulated speculations of Bruno and Campanella. Yet the unprecedented achievements of the scientific revolution, it should be pointed out, required rare acts of mathematical intuition which themselves were products of heroic-like genius. It is no wonder, therefore, that the subject of what constitutes human genius continued to play a central role in the writings of many of those furnishing literary and philosophical buttressing to the scientific revolution, and that their queries into the origin of their genial intuitions sometimes appeared to be more mystically than scientifically based.

Admittedly, certain of the major philosophical contributors to the climate of rationalism surrounding the scientific revolution contested a presumption of a reciprocal interrelation between genius and melancholy. Descartes, for one, characterized all sorrow as a “disagreeable languor in which consists the discomfort which the soul receives from evil,” and Spinoza in turn, with the humoral equivalent of Descartes’ *tristesse* in mind, set out to demonstrate with “geometrical” certainty the proposition underlying emotional well-being: “Mirth cannot be excessive, but is always good; contrariwise, melancholy is always bad.”²³ But it was also recognized at the same time—this by no less a philosophical luminary of the “age of reason” than Kant—

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 155–56.

²³ René Descartes, “The Passions of the Soul (Les Passions de l’Ame),” in *Essen-*

that the sublime heights to which genius aspired could scarcely be experienced without some corresponding feeling of melancholy.

As Kant put this physiological response to the experience of sublimation in no uncertain terms: "A man whose feeling (*Gefühl*) takes the path of melancholy does not become so characterized because, having been robbed of the joy of life, he grieves in dark depression;" on the contrary, "he becomes characterized as such because his sensations, having been augmented beyond a certain degree or for various reasons having taken a false direction, will tend to become exhausted more easily under these circumstances than under others." Such a melancholy man, attested Kant, "has a feeling for the sublime."²⁴ Kant's aesthetic split between the concepts of the finitely beautiful and the infinitely sublime, corresponding to the age-old adage that between finite and infinite things there is no proportion, was based on the anti-metaphysical epistemological postulate that between the sensible and supersensible realms of knowledge "an immeasurable gulf is fixed, which is impassable by theoretical reason as if they formed two separate worlds."²⁵ This skepticism-promoting proposition helping to set the stage for the Romantic movement heralded, among others, by Goethe, necessarily precluded demonstrable proof that the melancholy ensuing from a presentiment of the sublime is divinely instilled. Nevertheless, reminiscent of the resolution adopted by the Savonarolan skeptic Gianfrancesco Pico when confronted by a comparable philosophical quandary, it did succeed in admitting the powers of intuition to supply answers to various of

tial Works of Descartes, trans., ed. Lowell Bair (New York: Bantam, 1961), part IV, prop. 42, p. 152; Benedict de Spinoza, "The Ethics" (*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*), trans. R.H.M. Elwes, in *The Rationalists*, trans. John Veitch, R.H.M. Elwes, George Montgomery, and Albert R. Chandler (New York: Dolphin, 1960), p. 351. On the overall philosophical outlooks of Descartes and Spinoza see Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, I, 371 ff. and 434 ff.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (Riga: Bey Friedrich Hartknoch, 1771), abschn. II, p. 30. For an overview of Kant's critical philosophy see Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, II: *From the Enlightenment to the Age of Darwin* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 106 ff., with this tract treated, pp. 170 ff.

²⁵ Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, V, 182, cited in Randall, *Career of Philosophy*, II, 164. According to Randall, p. 173, Kant's idea of the sublime "rests on a want of proportion rather than a harmony between the imagination and the understanding. Beauty attracts and calms the soul in restful contemplation, the sublime arouses and moves it. In beauty the imagination has a finite and determinate task which it is able to fulfill; in the sublime, whether of mathematical size or dynamic force, the imagination cannot compass its infinite end."

life's conumdrums denied to finite reason, including, as it were, the conumdrum of human genius.

The scientific disciplines which can be said to be most directly influenced by such philosophical speculations as these, not unexpectedly, were psychology and anthropology. However, to the extent that their principal representatives of the succeeding centuries associated genius with melancholy alienation, it was along lines more closely resembling Aristotelian naturalism than Platonic supernaturalism that they made their case. Illustrating this school of thought at a pre-Freudian phase were, among the psychologists, Philippe Pinel and Jean Esquirol, and, among the anthropologists, Cesare Lombroso and Ernst Kretschmer. While coming into prominence after the humoral theory had played out its usefulness as a diagnostic tool of the medical community, each of these students of the human mind in his own way still associated human genius with the physiological condition termed melancholy by the traditional humoral diagnosticians.

Esquirol's analysis of religious melancholy can be taken as a characteristic representative of this way of thinking, as applicable, so to speak, to mental alienation in all its variant forms as to the specific form induced by religious anxiety in its narrow sense. Following the lead of his teacher Pinel, Esquirol divided religious melancholy into two basic types, corresponding to the two opposite directions in which the religious imagination is capable of leading the mind. The first type, termed by Esquirol "theomania" (*théomanie*), is represented by "those alienated souls who believe themselves to be God, who imagine that they hold intercourse and intimate communication with the Holy Spirit, with the angels and with the saints; who pretend to be inspired and to have received a mission from Heaven for the purpose of converting man." However, a second type of religious melancholy was also detected by Esquirol which involves putative communication, not with angels, saints, and the Holy Spirit, but with demons. Labeling this form of religious melancholy "cacodemonomania" (*cacodémonomanie*), Esquirol held it to embrace "all those unfortunate souls who believe themselves to be possessed by the Devil and to be in his power, and who are convinced that they have attended chimerical assemblies of evil spirits, and who believe that they have been condemned and consigned to the fires of Hell."²⁶

²⁶ Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol, *De Maladies Mentales Considérées sous les*

But in whichever forms religious melancholy might appear, judged Esquirol, it is just as medically treatable as any other kind of melancholic distemper.

More pointedly turning this analysis of mental alienation to the topic of human genius were the anthropologists Cesare Lombroso and Ernst Kretschmer, who, adopting a physiognomic interpretation of human psychosis, sought to endow the presumption of affiliation between insanity and genius with the stamp of scientific validation.²⁷ The melancholy state characterized by Kant as the result of a finite mind confronted by the infinitely sublime is here reduced, in basic affiliation with the Aristotelian naturalist tradition, to little more than a physiological reaction to the frustration of failing to achieve a vaguely defined mental objective. But modern psychological theory has demonstrated that the naturalist line adopted by the physiognomic school of Lombroso and Kretschmer was far from being the last word on the subject. For much the same fissure which divided Platonic supernaturalists and Aristotelian naturalists on the subject of genius in the late Renaissance has reappeared in the present day to divide modern psychological and anthropological theory, with two theoretical positions above all summarizing the modern split. The first is occupied by the Freudians, and the second, by the Jungians.

In both schools of psychological theory, Freudian and Jungian, there is reverberation of Kant's insight that a melancholic "has a feeling for the sublime." However, in his version of the melancholy reaction to sublimity, Freud showed himself to be essentially in agreement with the naturalist precepts of the Aristotelian tradition, whereas Jung in his version, with special affinity for the alchemical mode of expressing the needs of sublimation, opted for archetypal explana-

Rapports Médical, Hygiénique et Médico-Légal, 2 vols. (Paris: J.-B. Baillière, 1838), pp. 482–83. For an account tracing this theme from the sixteenth century medical writers, mainly northern ones, to Pinel see Maxime Laignel-Lavastine and Jean Vinchon, *Les Malades de l'Esprit et leurs Médecins du XVI^e au XIX^e Siècle: Les Etapes des Connaissances Psychiatriques de la Renaissance à Pinel* (Paris: Editions Medicales Norbert Maloine, 1930). Along the same line it is not by chance that Ciavolella, "Eros and the Phantasms of *Heroos*," in Beecher and Ciavolella, eds. *Eros and Anteros*, opens his essay, p. 75, with reference to Esquirol's medical notion of *monomanie erotique*, which he considers to be largely a modern reworking of the medieval concept of "heroic" love melancholy.

²⁷ See Cesare Lombroso, *Genie und Irsinn*, trans. A. Courth (Leipzig: Phillip Reclam, 1887, 1920), and Kretschmer, *Men of Genius*. It is understandable, accordingly, that a leading Tasso scholar of the turn of the century, Luigi Roncoroni, dedicated his *Genio e Pazzia in Torquato Tasso* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1896) to Lombroso (see above, note 12).

tions closer to the supernaturalist explanations of Plato. Freud's concept of sublimation, according to his contemporary interpreter Norman O. Brown, "is essentially an attempt to relate the organic and superorganic levels, as part of the general effort of psychoanalysis to rediscover the animal in man and to heal the war between body and soul."²⁸ Integral to Freud's strategy in this regard was a protracted analysis of "sorrow and melancholy" triggered by libidinous desire and psychic ambivalence.²⁹ Over and against this Freudian naturalist version of psychic sublimation is posed a supernaturalist version of the neo-Jungian James Hillman.

Sharply contesting a legacy of psychology which he sees as springing directly from Aristotle's mistaken "definition of soul as the life of the natural body inseparably bound with individual lives," Hillman has put himself on record as opposing all attempts, such as that of Freud, to construe psychological motivation as a response to merely natural needs. According to Hillman, this "Aristotelian fantasy rules Western psychology . . . ; it does so today whenever psychology assumes the organic biological slant toward the soul's events, or whenever it insists on empiricism."³⁰ Far closer to the truth of how the human psyche works, Hillman has concluded, is Jung, whose archetypal view of the human mind does not succumb to this naturalist fallacy. From this Jungian point of view, pre-eminently illustrated by the alchemists, melancholy is but a natural response to an impulse which exists in an archetypal realm existing beyond the bounds of nature. For through the stage of alchemical sublimation known as melancholy blackness or *nigredo*, as Jung himself noted, the alchemists "discover that in the very darkness of nature a light is hidden, a little spark without which the darkness would not be darkness."³¹

The modern popularity of the Jungian psychological outlook, together with that of the theosophical movement taking inspiration from the alchemists so central to Jung's analysis of the mind, should caution us that the coming of the scientific revolution, at bottom, has done nothing to undercut the supernaturalist version of human

²⁸ Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959), p. 137.

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Trauer und Melancholie," in *Gesammelte Werke*, X [1913-17] (London: Imago, 1946), 427-46.

³⁰ James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 206.

³¹ Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, p. 160.

genius. Aristotelian naturalism did not simply overcome Platonic supernaturalism in the post-Renaissance centuries, any more than naturalist philosophy overcame supernaturalist theology with which the Platonic position is integrally bound up. After all, it was Platonism, the principal vehicle for the doctrine of supernaturally derived genius, and not Aristotelianism with its theory of natural derivation, which ushered in the seventeenth-century mathematical revolution upon which the early scientific revolution closely depended. Understandably, therefore, the supernaturalist assumptions of the Renaissance Platonists, including the association of divine frenzy with extraordinary powers of mind, continued to exert considerable force in those later centuries in which the so-called scientific revolution came to fruition. If the downside of this development can be said to be an even more zealous pursuit of accused witches and sorcerers, its upside lay in the still widespread conviction that human genius owes to higher causes than those subsisting in brute matter.

It is under the sway of a like conviction that a recent writer, Morris Berman, has pleaded for a "re-enchantment of the world" following its purported "dis-enchantment" under the aegis of Enlightenment rationalism.³² Taking note of "epochal transformations" which, as he sees it, have imposed fundamental adjustments upon the human being for which their prior history has left them largely unprepared, Berman points to the Renaissance as "the most recent example prior to the present." According to Berman: "During such periods the meaning of individual lives begins to surface as a disturbing problem, and people become preoccupied with the meaning itself." Conditioned by this disquieting preoccupation, he avers, "such periods are characterized by a sharp increase in the incidence of madness, or more precisely of what is seen to define madness."³³

³² Thus, referring to Galileo's studies of motion, Berman has written in his *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell Univ., 1981; Bantam, 1984), p. 25: "In Galileo's scheme of things there is no 'natural place' anywhere in the universe. There is but matter and motion, and we can observe and measure it. The proper subject for the investigation of nature, in other words, is not why an object falls—there is no *why*—but *how*; in this case, how much distance in how much time." Concerning the subtle shift from one mode of thinking to the other, perceived as the gradual bifurcation of the Latin word *experimentum* into passively acquired empirical experience and an actively acquired knowledge based on a conscious testing of data through mathematical means, see Charles Schmitt's incisive article "Experience and Experiment: A Comparison of Zabarella's View with Galileo's in *De motu*," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 16 (1969), 80–138.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The reason for the widespread malaise and psychic dislocation characterizing such critical historical moments, Berman testifies, is that “value systems hold us . . . together, and when these systems start to crumble, so do the individuals who live by them.” Berman offers as at least a partial explanation that, during the time in question, “the last sudden upsurge in depression and psychosis (or ‘melancholia’ as these states of mind were then called) occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during which it became increasingly difficult to maintain notions of salvation and God’s interest in human affairs.” This highly volatile state of affairs, Berman further contends, “was ultimately stabilized by the emergence of the new mental framework of capitalism, and the new definition of reality based on the scientific model of experiment, quantification, and technical mastery.”³⁴ Perceiving a kind of materialist stultification in this purported capitalistic-scientific “stabilization” of the previous disjointed and “mad-like” behavior, Berman has argued for a return to a world when shared values, including the widespread belief in the power of magic, both guided human behavior and animated it with a meaning superior to that of mere mechanical functioning.

Recent scholarship has mounted up, represented by such judicious students of the arcane traditions as Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff, suggesting that Berman has overstated the materialist harvest of the scientific revolution. The upshot of this line of research is to view the occult traditions, not as replaced by scientific rationalism, but rather as stubbornly persisting alongside rationalism in a state of uneasy coexistence. While a reputed genial value of melancholy is more implicitly than explicitly treated by writings like those of Faivre and Hanegraaff, their conclusions assure us that the same concerns that troubled Italian intellectuals caught up in the Renaissance melancholy vogue, essentially belonging to all places and times rather than to one place and time only, were not likely to vanish with the advent of the modern world; rather, they would continue to vex the minds of men to the present day.

An observation by Faivre, for example, pertaining to the post-Renaissance theosophical movement fathered by the German mystic Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), can equally be applied to many of the Renaissance figures cropping up in the previous pages. “The

³⁴ *Ibid.*

theosophers,” writes Faivre, “have a heated imagination and for the most part, a melancholic temperament. . . . While searching for grace by means of the mediation of Nature and of their ‘interior principle’, they mix nature and grace, a direct and an indirect revelation.”³⁵ A melancholic reaction to the confrontation of nature and supernature, it would appear from Faivre’s survey of the theosophical movement, was as problematic for the post-Renaissance as for the Renaissance theorists of human genius, with the implication in the above quotation being that a melancholically “heated imagination” belongs more to the forces facilitating than obstructing the theosophical drive to knowledge. Carrying many of Faivre’s themes to the threshold of the twenty-first century in his analysis of the “New Age” movement, Hanegraaff also informs us, by implication if not by explication, that the basic intellectual conditions fomenting the melancholy problem during the Italian Renaissance are still with us.

Pointing up a therapeutic distinction among its contemporary participants between curing and healing—the former relegated to the physicians of the old school and the latter, to physicians of a new school of therapy basing their principles as much on spiritual as on physiological considerations, Hanegraaff has established the presence of a certain philosophical coherence beneath many seemingly disparate contributions to the New Age movement. Furnishing us a modern intellectual context for rearguing many of the moot philosophical points raised by the Renaissance theorists of human genius is Hanegraaff’s running account of such themes as individual “enlightenment” resembling the mystical and prophetic illuminations considered by many of the foregoing authors as a *sine qua non* of genius; as a perpetual interplay between powers of creativity (now viewed as self-creativity) and ecstasy; as “a psychologizing of religion combined with a sacralization of psychology;” as “the psychologization of esotericism;” as “a fundamental distinction between the Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC) and . . . a Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC);” and, most directly relating to our subject, as a shared assumption of the New Age movement that a “transpersonal”

³⁵ Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2000; orig. pub. as *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*, Vol. II, Gallimard, 1996), p. 18.

program of evolutionary progress entails perpetual pain and suffering at each stage of learning.³⁶ On this basis we can not only vigorously express our agreement with Hanegraaff's conclusion "that Platonism, with its attendant problems, apparently extends its influence into the heart of the New Age movement;"³⁷ we can also go a further step in this regard by specifying one "attendant problem" of Platonism that is especially pertinent to the present study. This is the problem of deciding whether melancholy is to be considered an ally to, or enemy of, the Platonically inspired New Age drive to become, as Hanegraaff puts it, "co-creators with God."³⁸

For the likes of the theosophists and their New Age progeny, then, the "enchantment" of the world needed no reinfusion, since it was not disrupted in the first place. The marvel-working virtues of human genius attested to them, as to their Renaissance forerunners, the existence of a hidden domain of nature which both immanently and transcendently exerts its powers upon the human mind. In this regard, Berman has furnished us with a helpful codicil to the present study. For in pointing up widespread "melancholia" which accompanied the painful transition from the medieval to the modern world, Berman has pinpointed the principal naturalist category by which Renaissance intellectuals attempted to explain, either apart from divine frenzy or in conjunction with it, the remarkable potency of human genius. Following Berman, we can conclude that the subject of human genius, which found the malaise of melancholy at the crux of its Renaissance and early seventeenth century discussions, represents but a specially defined case of the anxious transition from the

³⁶ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1998; orig. pub.: Leiden: Brill, 1996), esp. ch. 2, pp. 42 ff.; pp. 151, 187, 196–97, 227, 229, and 268. Cf. p. 394, note 45, citing Berman's *Reenchantment* for support that "the 'magical worldview' of Renaissance esotericism is also the model *par excellence* for the 're-enchantment of the world' that provides orientation to the New Age quest for a new paradigm."

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122. Cf., in this regard, p. 182: "I have given preference to the technical term 'meta-empirical' over such concepts as 'divine', 'spiritual' or 'supernatural' . . . The term 'meta-empirical' . . . simply indicates any reality beyond the empirical world accessible to common, intersubjective sense experience (or the extension of sense experience by scientific technology). The 'meta-empirical' covers God, gods, angels, invisible entities, and subjectively experienced presences or non-ordinary realities."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

dominantly supernaturalist middle ages to a modern age increasingly at home with scientifically demonstrable natural explanations. If it is true that the melancholy humor could no more be inductively discovered in nature than various other explanations of aberrant human behavior supplied by the Galenic medical tradition, being itself a deductive construct of the medieval and Renaissance physicians, it is equally true that the very attempt to reduce such behavior to its naturalistic bottom line helped to prepare the way for the subsequent subjection of the genius question to the rules of strict empirical examination.

In closing the present query into the Italian Renaissance debate over the origin of human genius, one last question remains to be answered speaking to its modern relevance. When we refer to alienated genius, traditionally associated with the physiological alienation called melancholy, is our focus to be restricted only to a small minority of gifted individuals, thereby excluding the vast majority of mankind, or are we justified in extrapolating from a concept of genius in its narrow sense the more general human condition? Putting this question another way: is there a generic basis of human genius which extends beyond a few gifted souls to include the whole of mankind? Once we have addressed this matter we will consider the final leg in the arduous journey of this study to be completed.

"It is generally conceded," Susanne Langer wrote a half century ago in her provocative *Philosophy in a New Key*, "that men have certain 'higher' aims and desires than animals; but what these are, and in what sense they are 'higher,' may still be mooted without any universal agreement." In the way of clarifying this point Langer has divided the weight of opinion about the incisive separation between human beings and animals into two basic schools, "one which considers man the highest animal, and his supreme desires as products of his supreme mind; and another which regards him as the lowest spirit, and his unique longings as a manifestation of his otherworldly admixture." Identifying these opposing perspectives of the human condition as, respectively, naturalist and religious, Langer explains: "To the naturalists, the difference between physical and mental interests, between organismic will and moral will, between hungry meows and harvest prayers, or between faith in the mother cat and faith in a heavenly father, is a difference of complexity, abstractness, articulateness, in short: a difference of degree. To the religious inter-

preters it seems a radical distinction, a difference, in each case, of kind and cause.”³⁹

In this stimulating plea for a “new key” in philosophy Langer ultimately sides with the naturalists—in her terms, that is, with the naturalist theorists of psychogenesis, with the critical point of departure between human beings and brute beasts professed to lie in the ability of human beings to transform signs into concept-making symbols. But the importance of Langer’s insights for the present study does not lie principally in her attempt to achieve, through the “key” of symbol-making, a philosophical resolution to the traditional naturalist-supernaturalist bifurcation. It lies rather in her analysis of a troublesome problem which has historically divided two ways of thinking about the status of the human mind. The first way, the religious-supernaturalist, has construed the human soul as an immortal entity in essential affiliation with the superterrestrial and eternal demons and angels, and a second way, the naturalist, has construed the human soul to be no more elevated than the highest rung of the animal ladder.

The present study was conceived with the idea of illustrating, with the problem of the origin of human genius as its fulcrum, how this debate between naturalists and supernaturalists played itself out on the genius-rich soil of Italy during the Renaissance. But it has also raised a more general philosophical question concerning the nature of a mind capable of reaching the psychic apex known as genius. Is the human mind, we ask, akin in its essential constituency to the indestructible incorporeal spirits known as demons or angels, or is it rather akin to the destructible corporeal beasts of nature? From this perspective, the subject of human genius belongs to a larger subject of the positioning of the human being in the welter of the cosmos.

Implicit in many of the writings treated in the course of the present study has been the supposition, for which the *pazzia* treatises—the closest Italian approximation to Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*—present the clearest examples, that each and every one of us carries within our souls the seed of genius. As Erich Kahler, with the specific subject

³⁹ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1942; repr., New York: New American Library [Mentor], 1948), p. 31.

of artistic alienation his focal point, has noted: "The alienation of the artist is only a symptom and symbol of the alienation of the individual human being for whom the artist stands and whose last bastion he is. . . . The history of man could very well be written as a history of the alienation of man."⁴⁰ The same can be said for other forms of alienation that we have encountered—the alienation, that is, of sorcerers, of mystics, of prophets, of poets, of artists, and of philosophers, all of whom, following this reasoning, are justly deemed to be but optimal cases of a genial power residing, to a lesser or greater degree, in every human mind. The key difference of opinion between those taking cognizance of such genial alienation lies in the question of whether its seed has been planted by nature or by a divine power residing above nature.

As understood by many of the writers drawn on for the purpose of this study, human genius in its manifold of possible expressions, whether implanted by nature, by God, or by a combination of the two, constitutes a generically transcendent capacity of the human spirit. As such it is fundamentally bound up with religious aspiration. As Norman O. Brown has argued: "Power is in essence a psychological category. And to pursue the tracks of power, we will have to enter the domain of the sacred, and map it: all power is essentially sacred power."⁴¹ The power of genius is no exception to this rule. The melancholy which is often found to attend the genius of poets, according to Heinz Flügel, "is both poetic and religious; or put more accurately, its religiosity labors in the domain of the poetical, of the aesthetic, and of sensibility."⁴² A comparable religious interpretation of melancholy genius, we have seen, can also be applied to other of its secularized expressions.

Brown has found a fitting symbol of the psychic quest of the infinite in the legendary figure of Faust, "the incarnation of our restless discontent."⁴³ But he could just as well have offered up as a suitable symbol of the human quest of the infinite the authentic St. Augustine, who confessed at the outset of his *Confessions* that his heart would never rest until it rested in God. For Faust, if we are to

⁴⁰ Erich Kahler, *The Tower and the Abyss: An Inquiry into the Transformation of Man* (New York: Viking, 1957), p. 43.

⁴¹ Brown, *Life Against Death*, p. 251.

⁴² Heinz Flügel, *Zweifel, Schwermut, Genialität* (Witten/Berlin: Eckart, 1952), p. 44.

⁴³ Brown, *Life against Death*, p. 51.

believe the lore surrounding his name, was only attempting to gain through illicit diabolical means what Augustine had sought through licit, prayerful means: both intuitive and cognitive entrance into the infinitely removed realm of God. In his mystical doctrine of *alienatio mentis*, then, Augustine can be said to have prefigured a popular "Faustian" motif of the Renaissance.⁴⁴ In so doing he also prefigured the notion that there is a touch of Faust in all of us.

At bottom all the varieties of genius treated in the foregoing pages, including the diabolical form represented by the central actor of the Faust legend, represent the "heroic" effort to cross over the abyss separating finitude from infinitude. Aside from the question of whether this heroic quest of human genius is instigated by a natural or a supernatural impulse, no more easily answered today than in the days of the Renaissance writers, its characteristic natural consequence is the "disease" *par excellence* of heroes, melancholy. But such melancholy genius, while setting some human beings apart from others, does not stand apart from the general matrix of human history. On the contrary, optimized in only a few but still inchoately present in the many, it is one of the mainsprings driving human history. For this reason, to paraphrase Kahler's statement above, the history of man could very well be written as a history of the melancholy genius of man.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ On this mystical concept see Nathan Rotenstreich, "On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of 'Alienation,'" *The Review of Metaphysics*, 16 (1963), 550-55, with Augustine treated at pp. 551-52.

⁴⁵ Attesting to this generalization, finding in the principle of "Utopia" a concerted attempt on the part of mankind to answer the psychological and social problems attending to the systematic human affliction of melancholy, is Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969), appearing in English as *Melancholy and Society*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992). Cf. Schleiner, *Melancholy*, revealing, p. 200 and *passim*, influence by Lepenies in his linkage of the concepts "melancholy," "genius," and "utopia."

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